

A Recipe for Change: Reclamation of  
Indigenous Food Sovereignty in  
*O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation

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## Abstract

*O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN), an Indigenous community in northern Manitoba, Canada, was flooded by Manitoba Hydro in 1974-75 and forced to relocate from its ancestral lands to a nearby settlement under dire circumstances. Regaining strength from their inherent cultural values grounded in their relationship with the land, OPCN subsequently formed a community-based food program called *Ithinto Mechisowin* ('food from the land') in part to respond to these impacts. This thesis uses OPCN's concept of resources to present a nuanced understanding of Indigenous food systems in Canada. I have framed the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty as a counter-hegemonic knowledge-in-action practice that brings in the multilayered and anticolonial view of food and the role food plays in reinvigorating individual, family and community level strengths in overcoming a wide diversity of challenges. I explore the many ways in which *Ithinto Mechisowin* inspires reconnection with land, thereby improving access to culturally appropriate healthy food and strengthening Indigenous food sovereignty and creating pathways to resurgence.

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To my parents  
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and  
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Elder Annie Spence  
and  
Elder Vivian Moose

# Table of Content

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Content</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Objectives and methods .....	3
1.2 Rationale for Theoretical Consideration.....	5
1.2.1 Strength-based Approach .....	7
1.2.2 Hunter-gatherer mode of production.....	10
1.2.3 Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF).....	11
1.2.4 Tree of Knowledge framework .....	12
1.3 Organization of the thesis .....	13
1.4 Author’s contribution .....	14
1.5 List of publications .....	15
<b>2. Literature Review</b> .....	<b>22</b>
2.1 Indigenous Food Sovereignty .....	25
2.1.1 Who is Indigenous?.....	25
2.1.2 Indigenous sovereignty .....	31
2.1.3 The place of food.....	49
2.2 Indigenous Food Sovereignty as a Political Movement .....	56
2.3 Indigenous Food Sovereignty as a Vehicle for Wise Practice.....	61
<b>3. Respect</b> .....	<b>82</b>
3.1 The Land, the People and the Way of Knowing.....	86
3.2 Story of a Healing Ethnography in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation .....	103
<b>4. Reciprocity</b> .....	<b>126</b>
4.1 Learning the Language of the River: Keeyask, the Churchill River Diversion, and O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation .....	130
<b>5. Responsibility</b> .....	<b>154</b>
5.1 Recipe for Change: Reclamation of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation .....	159

<b>6. Relationship.....</b>	<b>189</b>
6.1 Achieving Sustainable Livelihoods .....	193
6.2 Rethinking Sustainable Livelihoods Framework .....	215
<b>7. Resurgence .....</b>	<b>248</b>
7.1 Understanding Resurgence .....	251
7.1.1 Indigenous food sovereignty as resurgence .....	257
7.1.2 Resurgence of resource management .....	259
7.1.3 Resurgence in research.....	261
7.2 Resurgence: A living breathing process of social justice .....	262
<b>8. Appendix .....</b>	<b>268</b>
8.1 Consent Form for Interviews .....	268
8.2 List of Major Funding Resources .....	270

## List of Tables

Table 2-1: Indigenous conceptualizations of food including medicine, spiritual growth, community, and sociocultural experience.....	54
Table 3-1: An Indigenous research paradigm and strategy of inquiry.....	102
Table 5-1: The importance of seasonal local food harvesting and the impact of the Churchill River Diversion.....	176
Table 6-1: Number and types of workshops in the Ithinto Mechisowin program .....	211
Table 6-2: Country Food Distribution in OPCN over five months .....	211
Table 6-3: Different types of capitals in a Sustainable Livelihoods Framework .....	219
Table 6-4: Enhancing livelihood relationship with IMP.....	227

## List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Tree of Knowledge.....	12
Figure 2-1: Youth and Elders of OPCN skinning muskrat on the trapline .....	22
Figure 3-1: From left to right Elder Elder Juliet Spence, Asfia Gulrukh Kamal and Elder Rosalie Soulier (right).....	82
Figure 3-2: Tree of Knowledge (Respect) .....	84
Figure 4-1: White fish from Southern Indian Lake .....	126
Figure 4-2: Tree of Knowledge (Reciprocity) .....	128
Figure 5-1: Elder Helen Moose teaching fish fixing .....	154
Figure 5-2: Tree of Knowledge (Responsibility).....	156
Figure 5-3: Study location, <i>O-Pipon-Na-Piwin</i> Cree Nation.....	165
Figure 6-1: Elder Florence Donkey in the Muskrat camp .....	189
Figure 6-2: Tree of Knowledge (Relationship).....	191
Figure 6-3: DFID sustainable livelihoods framework .....	218
Figure 6-4: Study area.....	224
Figure 6-5: OPCN's perspective of sustainable livelihoods framework .....	230
Figure 7-1: Ithinto Mechisowin wild food recipe calendar 2015 .....	248
Figure 7-2: Tree of Knowledge (Resurgence) .....	250

## 1. Introduction

Colonization and postcolonial state development have had many negative impacts on the lives of Indigenous peoples<sup>1</sup> in Canada (Alfred, 2009; Anderson & Bone, 2009; Corntassel, 2008, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Hart, 2010, Hoffman, 2008; Kulchyski, 2005; Mascarenhas, 2012; Simpson, 2011). Some of these impacts represent barriers to maintaining Indigenous livelihoods and access to culturally appropriate food, as indicated by the following examples. In 1884, the Canadian government banned the potlatch, a traditional gift-giving ceremony, feast or gathering ritual for Indigenous people living in Canada, particularly in the west coast (Turner & Turner, 2007). The banning reflected a direct attack on Indigenous cultural integrity. The spiritual aspects of relationships with food within the potlatch and related ceremonies were disturbed. Without spiritual context and protocols for food, many elders argued that it was impossible to maintain traditions related to food (Turner & Turner 2007, p. 64). Similarly, from 1960 to 1970 the killing of the sled dogs damaged the Inuit food economy in the Baffin Region in the Canadian Arctic (McHugh, 2013). From 1960 onwards, the establishment of hydroelectric dams across northern Manitoba resulted in serious mercury contamination of fish harvested from the Churchill River and surrounding water sources (Hoffman, 2008; Waldram, 1988). A flourishing northern fishing economy was permanently damaged (ibid) and access to edible freshwater fish has become a challenge.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Canadian constitution 1982, Section 35, Aboriginal refers to First Nation (recognized by constitution), Métis (cultural and ethnic identity of individuals who are the result of relationships between Indigenous and Europeans), and Inuit (Indigenous people from northern Canada considered “Indian” in the Canadian constitution) people (Asch, 1984). The OPCN is composed of both First Nations and Métis individuals who speak both Cree and English. This thesis uses the term Indigenous to situate the community in the dialogue of Indigenous food sovereignty.

Until recently, fishers were not allowed to sell fish outside of the Crown Corporation Fresh Water Fish Marketing Corporation in Manitoba, Canada (Government of Manitoba, 2016; Thompson et al., 2014). A northern Manitoba Indigenous community still cannot open a restaurant to sell local food, including for example wild meat, due to restrictive food safety health regulations (Thompson, et al. 2011, p. 12). With a growing socio-economic crisis in northern Manitoba, it is evident that state-regulated community economic development methods are not working.

The literature on Indigenous livelihoods, ecosystems as well as food, culture and nutrition make links to malnutrition; unemployment and food insecurity; the deprivation of Treaty rights as related to Canada's resource-intensive capitalist economy; and discriminatory state law (Kamal et al., 2015; Mascarenhas, 2012; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Thompson et al., 2011). Studies have recommended immediate support from the province to help resolve issues related to poverty, hunger, and declines in health and to provide funding and support for locally initiated food programs and food subsidies as solutions (e.g., Northern Food Price Report, 2003; Thompson et al., 2011; Thompson et al., 2012).

Contemporary food politics has formed into a more complex web of capitalist strategies, going beyond the state's original politics of starvation and in addition to land crises, Indigenous peoples are experiencing the impacts of a wider global food economy and its influences on the local consumption, production and distribution of food (Kamal et al., 2015; Grey & Patel, 2015). Indigenous food sovereignty provides the scope to address these issues. In fact, Indigenous food sovereignty provides the basis for an anti-capitalistic livelihood system.

Within this context, it is important to note that despite immense challenges there are many ongoing successful community based food related projects in Canada that justify the

need to support alternative and culturally appropriate local initiatives (Kamal et al., 2015, Martens 2015; NMFCCC, 2016). The idea is to raise a deep question about what kinds of experiences are helping people to transcend colonized realities and strengthen relationships with language, ceremonies, and sacred histories of food from the land.

This study is a story of understanding Indigenous food sovereignty practice in *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation* (OPCN), a First Nation Reserve in northern Manitoba, Canada. It is about bringing the puzzle together to show how a community has survived into the modern capitalist world when there are no longer any regions that are free of the reaches of global capitalism. It is a story of hope, strength and potential of Indigenous cultural restoration and food sovereignty in Canada.

### ***1.1 Research Objectives and methods***

I argue that Indigenous food sovereignty is an ongoing sociocultural and political movement that inspires meaningful change, if deployed within a framework of resurgence. The goal of this study has been to understand the socioeconomic content and practice and impact of Indigenous food sovereignty in OPCN and, by implication, elsewhere in northern Canada. I present an Indigenous understanding of food sovereignty interpreted from the perspective of the OPCN members using the Indigenous research paradigm where some of the key concepts of the research are understood, framed and expressed in Cree language. To achieve this goal this project has three specific objectives:

- a) To gather information and develop understanding on the socio-economic context of Indigenous food sovereignty in northern Manitoba hydro flood-affected communities.
- b) To enhance the understanding of OPCN perspectives on and practices of Indigenous food sovereignty by participating in research with community.

- c) To identify the role of non-Indigenous allies in Indigenous food sovereignty projects and the role that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors can play in affecting policy.

My initial fieldwork and interaction with the community was framed in community based participatory research principles and a quantitative household food security survey. However, when I officially started my fieldwork and moved in to the community in 2012, I started to learn more about the significance of Indigenous research through my participation in community activities and started to explore the opportunities to learn about Indigenous methods defined and accepted by the community.

From 2012 onwards as the research was shaping as a collaborative community led endeavor, instead of survey and close ended questions I started focusing on methods that are chosen and led by community. The community has recommended storytelling along with participatory video, open-ended interviews instead of survey and close ended interviews and talking circle instead of focus group discussion as methods of knowledge sharing. Around 60 open-ended interviews, three participatory videos and ten talking circles were conducted and numerous informal dialogues, participation in community cultural gathering helped to document Indigenous land-based knowledge and develop the community based food program idea and its implementation. Throughout my doctoral program, this research was supervised by a team of community Elders, food champions who are members of *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program Committee. The thesis chapters were reviewed by *Ithinto Mechisowin* Committee members in between 2014 to 2017. My positioning as a research participant and my reflections will be discussed elaborately in research methodology chapter. Challenges to the research included time to conduct the study and the geographic distance from University of Manitoba to the OPCN community.

## ***1.2 Rationale for Theoretical Consideration***

Very simply, the theoretical analysis behind my thesis revolves around Indigenous rights and relationships to land and culturally appropriate food. The discussion also brings along the need to address the ontological and epistemological claims of Indigenous ways of knowing and the question of equity in research with Indigenous peoples. In so doing, I have taken guidance from critical Indigenous studies, a way of intervention, as defined by Justice (2016),

an interventionistic analytic of transformation committed to and dependent on local specificity within a broader network of relationships, a responsible but not unreflective obligation to community, a fierce commitment to truth, a robust insistence on multiplicity and complexity, and just action toward our human and other than human kin (p. 20).

Theories in Indigenous studies aim to “breathe life” into justice and locate justice in dialogues over Indigenous knowledge production and indigeneity (Dei, 2015; Nakata et al., 2012). Logically, literatures from critical Indigenous studies represent a commitment to “overcoming ‘dominant’ power relations and delivering ‘empowerment’ to Indigenous people on the ground in the form of practical action in Indigenous interests” (Hoogeven, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2016; Nakata et al., 2012, p.124). The realization is diverse based on participation, methods, geography, people and their histories of relationship with land. As Anishinaabe scholar Hayden King (2013) states, “While we may all dance to a similar beat, our footwork can take us in different directions. And there is nothing wrong with that”. The intention of critical indigenous studies is to start a conversation with local specific with the broader concerns (Justice. 2016, p. 20) and to engage critically with non-Indigenous analytic while taking lead in knowledge production (Moreton-Robinson, 2016, p. 4).

Contemporary critical Indigenous scholarship not only addresses questions of what is owed to these marginalized populations—specifically, being Indigenous might influence

particular cultural rights and responsibilities - but also takes a “knowledge-in- action” approach, which rekindles the acknowledgement and practice of traditional Indigenous knowledge of collectives that are usually subsumed by dominant western knowledge (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 125). This means a sense of practical knowledge production for Indigenous life and world is promised along with academic concerns for theory and methods. Indeed, theorizing must lead to politics in everyday life. As Dei (2015) states:

The worth of a “social theory” must not be measured simply in terms of its philosophical and ontological claims, but rather, in terms of its ability to offer a social and political corrective. In speaking about theorizing “indigeneity” and “aboriginality”, I therefore, want to take back theory and make it work to reflect ones politics and lived realities. Knowledge, experience and practice must lead to theory. Consequently, as Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples, we cannot theorize ourselves out of our identity (p. 8).

The conceptual framework for critical Indigenous theory is holistic in nature and evolving continually with goals that include looking for community well-being, investing in livelihoods, and social, cultural, and environmental sustainability and its relationship to land. It argues that the dire socioeconomic and political realities of Indigenous people cannot be “housed by the tokenism of recognition, rights and reconciliation” (Hokowhitu, 2016, p. 100). The renewal of these goals is informed by a range of strategies, including respect for place and diversity, acceptance of difference, understanding the role of nature in the hegemonic market system; equitable distribution of resources; dismantling asymmetrical power relations, and building just and participatory relationships while implementing change and transcending beyond the idea. What captures my imagination here is, within the interplay of place, culture, action, how profoundly the idea of Indigenous strength is defined. It is here I intend to put strength-based approach in conversation with Indigenous food sovereignty.

### 1.2.1 *Strength-based Approach*

Strength-based approach is defined mostly in Indigenous health and community economic development literatures as an appreciative inquiry that emphasize the need for research with Indigenous peoples based on strengths, rather than deficits, and to learn from an Indigenous worldview (Al-Naser et al, 2005; Brough et al, 2004; Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015; Greenwood et al, 2004; Tagalik, & NCCA, 2009; Tedmanson, & Guerin, 2011). I have chosen to look at the OPCN case using a strength-based approach, with an aim to present an alternative history of Indigenous peoples as opposed to the colonial portrayal of history. I place strength based approach as an essential component of decolonizing research (e.g. Chilisa, 2012; Hart, 2010; Kovach 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Wuttunee, 2004). To apply a strength-based approach, I am framing Indigenous food sovereignty as a counter-hegemonic practice that brings in the multifaceted context of food and the role it plays reinvigorating strengths as these relate to individuals, families and communities when overcoming challenges.

People of OPCN, also known as the community members of South Indian Lake, are known for their strength—physical and spiritual vigor, which emerges from their cultural integrity and has been nurtured for centuries (Kamal et al., 2015; Waldram, 1988). People used to have happy, healthy and long-lasting lives until recently. The community fell prey to state-designed “development” projects in northern Manitoba in early 70s, and was relocated from their ancestral lands to a nearby settlement due to hydroelectric dam construction (Hoffman, 2008; Waldram, 1988). The land was flooded causing major losses in food resources and their subsistence economy - fishing. Regaining strength from their inherent cultural values, OPCN people have continued their commitment towards their land-based practices, eventually forming a community-based food program called the *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program (IMP) or ‘food from the land’, which inspires all season land-based

food harvesting activities in the community and the archiving of traditional knowledge. When I first heard about the flooding from a fisher, Steve Ducharme in OPCN, I asked him, “What did all the fishers do after the flooding?” He answered,

We did what our Elders would do, go out in the land and water and look for unaffected areas, new water ways where we can fish, look for land where we might find game and started protecting what’s left. Then we shared the facts with our youth. Of course, there are many other steps that came after that but this one was first. We belong to a community where there was a hunter who lost one of his arms due to an accident, but he was known as the best hunter, trapper and fisherman in the community. ... he was strong, but his Elders taught him so well! And he cannot but hunt and fish and trap, because that’s all he did in his life, live off the land. (S. Ducharme, personal communication, October 9, 2013)

This is a story of strength and there are numerous untold stories like this where Indigenous peoples’ strengths are visible through their relationships with land and unparalleled persistence (Wuttunee, 2004). But more than that, it is important to realize how OPCN’s people created a focus of self-governance in relation to land in the time of struggle. The “story of hope” reflected in this thesis is the perspective of community development that is translated through the determinations that “quantify all the costs of development decisions on environment, people, communities, and future generations” (Wuttunee, 2004, p. 7).

The quote above shows the exceptional strength of a community that no matter how desperate the situation might be, communities have inner strength and creativity to combat the situation. A strength-based approach in research on wise practice<sup>2</sup> therefore should

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<sup>2</sup> This term is introduced in the literature to replace the term ‘best practice’ (generally indicating the most suitable practice in the community that can be adopted and implicated for success of a program). Wise practice, in contrast, is defined as, “locally-appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable conditions” (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010, p. 19). Wise practice does not rank practices as best or worst, it relies on wisdom and success of a particular community (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015, p. 43).

highlight the significance of this exceptional strength that how it does not need to depend on external expertise and how support for existing and potential strengths can make a project sustainable (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015).

Taking a strength based approach “begins with the premise of creating social change” and empowering “the actors within multi-layered contexts” and engaging “the multiple strengths of individuals, families and communities” to overcome challenges (Kana’iaupuni, 2004, p. 29). Strength-based inquiry towards Indigenous community and its local knowledge and experience provides a new ground in defining a future that will build on and amplify Indigenous cultural strategies (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015) where a relationship based social order will be celebrated as oppose to colonial capitalist hierarchical social order that causes obliteration of Indigenous lives, resources and lands (Tagalik & NCCAH, 2009).

The strength of Indigenous food system and any form of Indigenous food harvesting technique whether it is hunting, trapping, harvesting medicines and berries or farming, is that it maintains non-exploitative, balanced relationship to land (Cote, 2016; Demi, 2016). Despite the strength is marked as key to sustainability (Kuhnlein, 2015; Laduke, 1999), mainstream food sovereignty discourse fails to adequately address Indigenous claims to food, land and water (Daigle, 2017; Grey & Patel, 2015). As Grey and Patel states (2015, p. 432), “the central ideas of food sovereignty map imperfectly onto Indigenous struggles in North America.” The fact that state-centric and agriculture centric food sovereignty disregard Indigenous food system practices such (as hunting, gathering, trapping, fishing) and right to self-determination is more pronounced in recent food sovereignty debates (Daigle, 2017; Morrison, 2011). Underlining this disconnect is key to the understanding of reclamation of Indigenous food sovereignty and resurgence. Denial of this strength in food sovereignty discourses is denial of the strength of relationship and Indigenous knowledge. Any act towards the practice of Indigenous food sovereignty thus becomes the act of resistance and

resurgence against colonial-capitalist entities (Daigle, 2017; Grey & Patel, 2015; Morrison, 2011).

### *1.2.2 Hunter-gatherer mode of production*

Food system in northern Manitoba Indigenous communities is composed of traditional harvesting strategies and practices of hunting, fishing, trapping (NMFCCC, 2016; Reynar & Matties, 2013). In thinking about the strength and nuances of relationship visible in the local food system in communities in northern Manitoba, I find hunter gatherer mode of production useful because: a) it provides a deep understanding of relationships in hunter-gatherer food system, b) it connects Indigenous claims of land and cultural restoration directly with Indigenous food sovereignty discourse. Hunter-gatherer mode of production theory articulates Indigenous relationships translated through reciprocal communal actions, such as communal use of land, communal sharing of food, communal sharing and practice of traditional knowledge, skills, capacity and considering time, knowledge within the community relationship as “asset/wealth (Brody, 2000; Barnard, 2004; Kulchyski, 2005; Ridington, 1982). Mode of production is adopted here as a “distinct mode of life” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 65) based on the practice of living in balance. The hunter gatherer mode of production provides the basis to understand inherent cultural strength of OPCN and its resistance to the state-led capitalist resource extracting economy that destroys the balance.

The framing of OPCN circumstance in the hunter gatherer mode of production calls for a discussion of various interconnected issues such as: how far are settler colonialism, agricultural and territorial expansion, industrialization, formation of state, and environmental loss responsible for the alteration of social relations of a group of people who identify themselves as hunter-gatherer, harvesters, trappers and fishers? How did their mode of subsistence change? How do contemporary modes of livelihood combine wage labour, state

benefit, and agriculture with traditional livelihoods and food harvesting practices? How do they relate to non-Indigenous groups and institutions, and what historical depth do these relations have? Each chapter presented in this thesis reflects an attempt to give answers to the above-mentioned questions and to elaborate the meaning of “resource”, “livelihood” and “food” for OPCN.

### *1.2.3 Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF)*

At the initial stage of this research I intended to keep the basic SLF as one of my key analytical frame. In my quest to understand Indigenous food sovereignty in northern Manitoba context, I realized that there is a gap in the analysis as food sovereignty and SLF literatures do not analyze Indigenous livelihood challenges based on strength, cultural restoration or resurgence framework. Additionally, the conceptualization of assets in SLF remains limited. To reframe SLF and its association with Indigenous food sovereignty, in this thesis I have provided a culture focused and resurgence focused analysis of SLF I have argued that despite its diverse application in scholarly work, SLF is considered somewhat inadequate in the study of structural subordination, particularly while analyzing livelihoods of Indigenous peoples. Hence, integrating the understanding of cultural dynamics of Indigenous livelihood system can minimize the knowledge vacuum in livelihood discourse and initiate meaningful application of SLF identifying structural discrimination at the community level. From an Indigenous worldview, SLG is viewed in terms of relationships emphasizing “the resource base, ecosystem services, people and other species” and “not just an efficient allocation of resources over time, but also a fair distribution of resources and opportunities between the current generation and between present and future generations” (Milne, Tregidga & Walton, 2004, p. 5-6). This understanding resonates with the Indigenous food sovereignty claim and argues for the importance of integrating cultural restoration and interconnected

relationships in the understanding of the history and politics of Indigenous livelihoods in Canada and a path towards possible resurgence. (Kamal & Martens, 2015).

By centering my approach to Indigenous food sovereignty as a strength-based framework and rooting the framework in certain cultural and relational principle such as – respect, reciprocity, responsibility, relationship and resurgence- I find a different, much more complex and meaningful common ground to place OPCN story and the trajectory of the research. This common ground is portrayed by the tree of knowledge framework.

#### 1.2.4 Tree of Knowledge framework

The Tree of Knowledge relates the Indigenous research paradigm reflected in this thesis and connects the concepts like mode of production, indigenous food sovereignty and resurgence with the OPCN case and makes it a cohesive and single story of strength. The concept of Tree of Knowledge arose in one of the community gatherings conducted at OPCN during my fieldwork in 2014. Community members were discussing the question, how to express traditional knowledge archiving and sharing through participatory video, a western data collection technique, and the result of the discussion was this Tree of Knowledge.

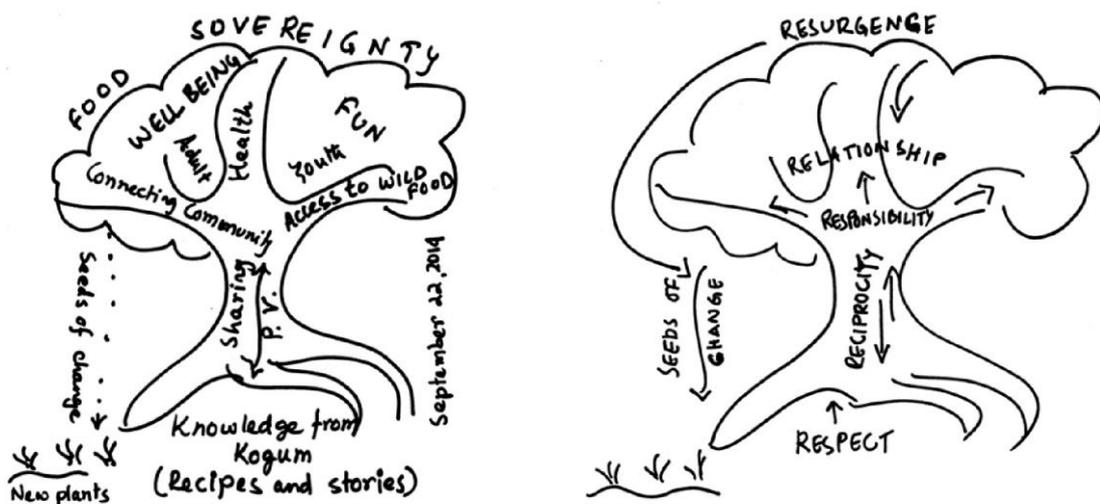


Figure 1-1: Tree of Knowledge

This picture (on the left) tells the story of the land-based mode of relationship, knowledge sharing and how that transcends to collective well-being and contributes to a sustainable food system. It shows a way to turn colonial reality to a new Indigenous reality. The participants applied a non-Indigenous tool to design an Indigenous knowledge-sharing project and interpreted and expressed the story in Indigenous terms. While outlining this thesis I have used the same framework of Tree of Knowledge not only to posit resurgence as an outcome of Indigenous food sovereignty practice, but also to explain the execution of this research. With respect to the latter I have linked the main themes reflected in this thesis with the following concepts: respect, reciprocity, responsibility, relationship and resurgence. Each chapter focuses on one such theme. The connection between the chapters, that is, the larger narrative of the thesis as a whole, is captured as the tree and the different aspects of the “one” story of OPCN.

### ***1.3 Organization of the thesis***

The first chapter of this thesis is an Introduction that outlines the thesis problematic, background, goals and objectives and organization of the thesis. The second chapter is the Literature Review, titled as ‘reflection’, which consists of reflection on the hunter gatherer mode of production and a reflection of different aspects of Indigenous food sovereignty. This thesis has five additional empirical chapters titled in sequence as ‘respect’, ‘reciprocity’, ‘responsibility’, ‘relationship’ and ‘resurgence’. Chapter Three titled ‘respect’ is an ethnographic interpretation of the community and my personal experience of working with an Indigenous community. This chapter also provides a justification of methodology applied in this PhD research. Chapter Four is titled ‘reciprocity’ and discusses human-nature reciprocity and state-imposed challenges to nature’s rights and food resources. Chapter Five is titled ‘responsibility’ and discusses the implications of community planning for food practices. Chapter Six is titled ‘relationship’, and elaborates on Indigenous perspectives of the

sustainable livelihoods literature. Chapter Seven is titled ‘resurgence’ and contains concluding remarks and explores future research possibilities.

Additionally, I have included one story in each chapter to share the insights of cultural nuances embedded in the everyday life of OPCN. These stories were shared with me spontaneously during my interviews and gatherings in the community. I felt these stories shows the wit, humor and cultural intelligence that the community members exercise, despite being confronted by an oppressive dominant system. These are narratives woven within the strength of anticolonial ethos and are very much a part of ongoing indigenous sovereignty practice in OPCN. Sharing of these stories reveals the practice of a “radical alterity” (as oppose to capitalist social order) that functions “at the liminal margin of contemporary culture” (Kulchyski, 2005, p. 42). Indeed, as Elder Gitskan questions, “If this is your land, where are your stories?” (quoted in Korteweg & Oakley, 2016, p. 131).

#### ***1.4 Author’s contribution***

Most of these empirical chapters have in part or in whole been published in peer-reviewed journals or in books. Part of Chapter Three has already been published in the Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development. Both Chapter Five and Six are published in peer-reviewed journals—the former published in Journal of Peasant Studies and the latter in the Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development. However, to provide continuity and to facilitate a larger thesis narrative, each of thesis chapters has its own prelude that describes the context of the publication, a chapter summary, and its relevance to the larger thesis research goal and objectives.

For all the published papers, I have contributed as principal author. Paper concepts were developed in consultation with all co-authors. All coauthors reviewed and approved the final draft. All my coauthors have given permission to include the papers as part of my thesis

chapters. The introductory chapter, literature review and the concluding chapter are not published or coauthored and are written solely by me.

### **1.5 List of publications**

Kamal, A. G., Linklater, R., Thompson, S., Dipple, J. and Ithinto Mechisowin Committee. (2017) Recipe for Change: Reclamation of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation for Decolonization, Resource Sharing and Cultural Restoration in *Politics of Food: Concept, Practice & Social Movements*. (pp. 145-159) New York: Routledge.

Kamal, A. G., Linklater, R., Thompson, S., Dipple, J. and Ithinto Mechisowin Committee. (2015) Recipe for Change: Reclamation of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation for Decolonization, Resource Sharing and Cultural Restoration. *Globalization* 12(4), 1-17.

Kamal, A. G., Martens, T. and Ithinto Mechisowin Committee. (2015) Rethinking Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: An Indigenous Perspective, *The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, 9(2), 51-64.

Kamal, A. G. (2015) The Story of Healing with O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN), *The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, 9(2), 3-8.

Kamal, A. G., Thompson, S., Linklater, R., and Ithinto Mechisowin Committee (2014). Achieving sustainable well-being through indigenous food sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation in F. Deer, T. Falkenberg, B. Mcmillan, & L. Sims (Eds). *Sustainable Well-Being Concepts, Issues, and Educational Practice* (pp. 1-21). Winnipeg, MB: ESWB Press.

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## 2. Literature Review



**Figure 2-1: Youth and Elders of OPCN skinning muskrat on the trapline**

*Look at the tree and you will learn it all. It keeps you grounded, gives you food, helps you grow, shows you how to be wise and stand strong and teaches you how to share the fruit of your knowledge with others. When I was young my parents told me to respect a tree, they asked me not to bother them.....I want my children to learn from the Elders, but also look for new ideas and use their mind to take the path that is right.*

*V. Moose, personal communication, August 1, 2012.*

## **The Hunting Season**

**Story teller: Barb Spence**

*Wisahkicahk<sup>3</sup> was travelling one day. He saw a flock of geese preparing to fly. He said, brother, I really envy your flying power. Can you make me fly?*

*The goose said, yes, you can be a goose too. Then he turned Wisahkicahk into a goose. He said do not look down if you hear someone shooting at us. If you look down you will fall. They all started to fly. Wisahkicahk was the biggest of all geese and was flying at the very back. When they were passing some hunter, the hunters shoot at Wisahkicahk.*

*Wisahkicahk looked down and fell in no time. He got shot in his bum. Hunters were happy that they had had a good hunt. But before they could catch him, the Wisahkicahk ran away rubbing his bum and saying, I will never become a goose again! The geese flock flew away laughing at him.*

B. Spence, personal communication, October 11, 2013

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<sup>3</sup> I was told that Wisahkicahk is a character in Cree stories in northern Manitoba that is a shape shifter, sometimes benevolent but also mischievous, and an integral part of reasoning and morals in a community. I did not receive a lot of detail on the character; however, every story started with his powerful charisma.

## Chapter Summary

In my search for literature I wanted to explore the strengths of Indigenous food systems existing both in past and contemporary times. The review continues to the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty where the role of food is explored to understand Indigenous cultural strengths in different social, cultural and political settings. With an intention to explore the strength and characteristics of the non-capitalist hunter gatherer economy in OPCN context, I have looked at hunter gatherer mode of production theory. Additionally, the literature review is a reflection on an Indigenous food sovereignty framework in a national and global perspective.

My intention of bringing in the above story and the quote from Elder Vivian Moose is to remind myself that disturbance to the law of nature continues to reproduce power imbalances in society. Her words also help me keep in mind that doing research and a literature review are fine, but it is the task of an individual to decide and choose the righteous path. This critical understanding is shared in the simplest way in OPCN community through stories and conversations. Lessons like these are no less relevant than academic literature review or theories of social justice.

## 2.1 *Indigenous Food Sovereignty*

Indigenous food sovereignty brings in discourses and dialogues related to the cultural and land rights of Indigenous peoples that ensure their access to traditional food (Grey & Patel, 2014; Kamal et al. 2015; Morrison, 2011; Menser, 2014; Shattuck, Schiavoni & VanGelder, 2015). The term “Indigenous food sovereignty” consists of three very loaded words. The central theme of food shows how food has been a principal tool of continued colonization of Indigenous peoples and how the food justice movement has been creating possibilities and combating colonial politics. The relationship between these three words—Indigenous, food and sovereignty—uncovers more nuanced interpretations of historical injustice that are sensitive to how the terms might influence and strengthen contemporary accounts of what is required for justice in Indigenous communities. This literature review begins with an exploration of what makes Indigenous Peoples and cultures unique.

### 2.1.1 *Who is Indigenous?*

The word ‘indigenous’ is often associated with living beings that thrive in their original/native place through an ecologically spontaneous process (Armstrong & Nelle, 2013). For people or human beings this definition is often linked with time and place, which refers to someone who is living in a geographical area prior to newcomers who settle later (Whyte, 2012). The thriving relationship between Indigenous peoples and their original place and ecology grows through different place-based activities ranging from harvesting food to taking political action to protect food resources from discriminatory law and research practices. For example, in Minnesota, *Anishnabe* people are actively working against government, university research and mining projects to protect Indigenous wild rice production (Andow et al., 2009; Laduke & Carlson, 2003; LaDuke, 2003;). In New Zealand, in support of the land claim of *Maori* people, the government agreed to acknowledge river rights and recognize the Whanganui River as a legal person (Postel, 2012). Similarly, in Ecuador, Indigenous peoples

are actively mending and revising the government constitution to include and address the legal rights of nature— forest, river, land and air (De La Cadena, 2010). In India, in the *Chipko* movement, Indigenous women, in an attempt to protect the forest and its resources, took part in non-violent protest by hugging trees and stopping forestry contractors from chopping them down (Agarwal, 2010, p. 79). Indigenous people's actions to protect the health and wellness of the environment are associated with their local food systems (Lien & Nelrich, 2004, p. 11). Hence, Indigenous food is locally embedded and is an integral part of being indigenous.

Whilst actions to protect relationships with nature and traditional cultures explain the term Indigenous, the act of defining Indigenous people has proven to be controversial on the international stage. International recognition of Indigenous people's rights is the outcome of a long-standing Indigenous sovereignty movement (Corntassel, 2012, 2015; McNeil, 2004). Whilst such recognition brings Indigenous issues into the discourse and to the discussion table, the lack of thoughtful definition and its application creates further challenges for Indigenous people's livelihoods and access to resources. For example, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2005) described Indigenous people in the following manner:

Indigenous peoples are the inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to other people and to the environment. Indigenous peoples have retained social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live. Despite their cultural differences, the various groups of Indigenous peoples around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples.

This description deliberately avoids providing or using any formal definition of indigeneity. Instead the Forum focuses more on attributing certain characteristics and providing a uniform definition rather than stressing the diversity and uniqueness of cultural

integrity. More importantly, by providing a rather “safe” definition that does not provide opportunities for Indigenous autonomy, the United Nations helps perpetuate oppressive practices towards Indigenous peoples, both at the national and international level.

In article 20 (paragraph 11) of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007) there are guiding principles of Indigenous subsistence rights:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.

This statement was identified as revised to negate “all other past actions that have deprived Indigenous peoples of their means of subsistence and development” (White Face, 2013, p. 68 quoted in Corntassel 2015, p. 67). The implication of such revision means the denial of:

- a) Indigenous peoples’ relation to land through subsistence activities (White Face 2013, 68).
- b) Indigenous peoples’ spirituality that is sustained through these activities (ibid; Corntassel, 2015, p. 67)
- c) Indigenous concepts and practices of sustainability that thrive on everyday subsistence activities (both socioeconomic and spiritual) that continue through generations (Mohawk, 2006, p. 26) and are grounded in Indigenous resilience and reciprocity (Corntassel, 2015, p. 67).

When Indigenous rights are ill-defined, narrow and generalized through the process of international recognition, this contributes to both national and international colonial politics. As Corntassel (2007) argues, “The politics of recognition in its contemporary form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for

recognition have historically sought to transcend” (p. 45). In many ways such definitions can negatively affect Indigenous livelihoods.

While describing the negative impact of the global definition of indigeneity, Shah (2007) considers “the concept of Indigenous people [to be] anthropologically and historically problematic” (p. 1806) and argues that “the local appropriation and experiences of the global discourse on indigeneity can maintain a class system that further marginalizes the poorest” (p. 1825). She brings in a case study of Madhya Pradesh, India, where forest elephants were destroying the homes and agricultural produce of a group of Indigenous people living by the forest. Affected communities were unable to legally mitigate these impacts either by killing the elephants or clearing the forest that gives way for elephants to do the destruction, because by doing that they would deny their Indigenous identity and its association with “ecological harmony” as defined by the regional governance system (ibid). The case study attests to the fact that, despite progress in the global recognition of Indigenous rights, “the implication of these transnational developments for targeted people in the specific localities are far from clear and have received very little in-depth scrutiny” (ibid, p. 1825). Additionally, it is important to identify how state authority in this case was strategically using the definition as a political tool to deny Indigenous wellbeing and access to food.

The idea of defining authentic indigeneity can be dangerous and abusive for people and individuals who do not fall within such definitions due to colonial intrusion. In Canada, the case of labeling the Métis as half-breeds (Fumoleau, 2004; Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992) or in New Zealand the *Maori* and Crown relationship discussion on keeping the urban *Maori* issues invisible (Tennanth, 2005, p. 804) represent examples of abuses instigated by such state-led identity definitions. As Fumoleau (2004) states, discussing the status of Métis people during the early Canadian numbered treaty period,

Half-breeds are children of two races. Bullied and cheated, they occupy a cruel position. They are not classed as Indians; they are not white men. All too often they rank as nonentities (p. 501).

That said, the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples claims rights to natural resources including the practice of subsistence activities on the land and water (UNDRIP, 2007). These claims are significantly appropriate for the recognition of the right to food, collective living and cultural uniqueness (Corntassel, 2015; UNDRIP, 2007). Additionally, such international platforms are widely identified as a positive step towards the abolition of colonial recognition politics (Corntassel, 2015). The cultural rights-based international alliance politics highlight the significance of Indigenous people's roles in global wellness in the context of environment, health and biodiversity and it can be helpful to contest impediments created by the state against Indigenous sovereignty. For example the UN Special Rapporteur and Indigenous leaders strongly criticized Canada, Australia and New Zealand for not signing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ibid, p. 66). There is a global cohort of activists and academics who are working and contesting the marginalization of Indigenous peoples through national and international rights-based bylaws. The ongoing Idle No More movement in Canada is a beaming example of one such cohort (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014). At the national level, a good example of acknowledging Indigenous values can be the introduction of the rights of Indigenous peoples in academic research through the inclusion of Indigenous rights in research ethics (Castellano, 2004).

However, having a declaration, national or international, that has Indigenous rights to self-determination well-defined, is not enough to defeat discriminatory structural forces. For example, in 1975 the Declaration of the Dene Nationhood, a political manifesto demanding the full recognition of the Dene as a self-determining nation, was signed (Corntassel, 2014; Kulchyski, 2005). Yet, the struggle of Dene for recognition against expensive and delayed

land claims and many other conflict-ridden strategies by the Canadian government has continued for years (Coulthard, 2014, p 13, 64). Canada's colonial history has many examples of malicious State strategies—Indian Act, numbered treaties, Residential schools, Bill C31, Bill C-45—all of these representing regulatory landmarks of state-led colonialism applied to weaken Indigenous cultural practices and to consolidate control over natural resources (Corntassel, 2014; Mascarenhas, 2012; Simpson, 2008, 2011).

In short, the discussion of being Indigenous emphasizes that Indigenous rights are inherently cultural and communal (based on relationship with both tangible and non-tangible entities). In many ways indigeneity is defined in relation to one's true self that consists of an unbridled land and water based livelihoods and cultural practices based on relationship (Wildcat et al, 2014). It cannot be seen ahistorically and hence the process of being Indigenous is most definitely a form of resistance and resurgence (Corntassel, 2014; Simpson, 2011). Being Indigenous means understanding the constantly changing world of colonial politics where Indigenous sovereignty must be sought after by bringing forth meaningful change ranging from contesting a UN declaration or state regulation to the practice of Indigenous research in the academia to undertaking community-led cultural and traditional subsistence practices (Corntassel, 2012, p. 152, 156).

Within this context, one must realize the role of state and its application of the term 'sovereignty' are logically contested by scholars when associated with Indigenous people's rights and reclamation (Alfred, 2009; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Corntassel, 2008, 2012, 2014; Simpson, 2008). Contrary to state-led sovereignty, Indigenous sovereignty has been defined as an act towards the practice of Indigenous governance and philosophies in everyday life honed by self-determination (Corntassel, 2008). The following sections shed light on the difference between the concept of classical sovereignty and Indigenous sovereignty.

### 2.1.2 *Indigenous sovereignty*

Whilst the classic definition of sovereignty was given by F.H. Hisley, as “final and absolute in a political community” (1966, p. 1), the concept is better known as the describing characteristic of the modern state and its functioning system (Litfin, 1998, p. 16). The sovereignty discourse is discussed in relation to borders and territorialization and is considered a key factor behind the growth of the classical idea of sovereignty and the state’s method of claiming authority over communities and their territories (Litfin, 1998; Menser, 2014). Philpott (2001, p. 3) states, “Virtually all of the earth’s land is parceled by lines, invisible lines that we call borders. Within these borders, supreme political authority typically lies in a single source—a liberal constitution, a military dictatorship, a theocracy, a communist regime. This is sovereignty.” The defining method and interpretation of the term explain intricacies of power imbalances that influence the ethos of the world. Hence it can be argued that the act of territorialization is socially constructed and generates binaries such as legitimate/illegitimate, legal/illegal, ceded/unceded or recognized/unrecognized (Litfin, 1998; Menser, 2014).

Considering how the term is applied, sovereignty is divided into two types:

- a) External sovereignty that strategizes relationship between state and international institutions making transnational policies, laws and treaties. Although external sovereignty refers to concepts such as liberation, equality or autonomy, most ironically it reproduces state authority since mostly international decisions are made with votes from state parties (Litfin, 1998, p. 7).
- b) Internal sovereignty or domestic sovereignty stand in the face of the state’s authority to control its own affairs, control people and their possessions within its territorial boundaries. The key aspect of internal sovereignty is the principle of noninterference both from domestic and foreign sectors (ibid).

The application of the concept of sovereignty lies in a more complex model of domestic and international political power where hierarchies between states are created by geographical borders decided through lengthy and violent wars that affect the social, political, economic and environmental factors impacting on the people of the state. The creations of First World vs Third World or Fourth World binaries are examples of such division. Within this context, the resources of a “poor” country are controlled by international regulations/environmental policies within which the poor country plays a minimum role. For example, a Third World country may not participate in an international environmental treaty-making process because of the lack of funding to send delegates (ibid). In the context of domestic sovereignty, state power over certain communities and territories using nonconsensual and nonintervention power acts in a similar way. Within this discussion of sovereignty, my aim will be to elaborate on how Indigenous sovereignty is different from classical sovereignty and how that reproduces the supremacy of the state.

Indeed, the most unique concept of sovereignty without state power comes from Indigenous peoples (Menser, 2014, p. 68). The Indigenous definition of sovereignty is grounded in a conception of self-determination that “must take into account multiple patterns of human associations and interdependency” and that stands on the composition of political, economic, ecological and sociocultural factors (Corntassel, 2008, p. 116). Indigenous sovereignty prioritizes a number of factors such as—

- traditional practices such as languages, and traditional subsistence practices (hunting, fishing, berry and medicine picking etc.).
- collective relationships with all beings (both human and non-human) and their consideration of them as community and relations (Corntassel, 2008; Hart, 2010).
- sacred relationship with land and water that is a shared space for the community (Corntassel, 2008; Hart, 2002;).

A combination of these aspects creates an Indigenous practice of sovereignty as sacred land becomes ecocultural territory where all relations are given responsibilities of sustainability for shared and collective wellbeing. As Corntassel (2008) writes, “It is one’s individual and shared responsibilities to the natural world that forms the basis for Indigenous governance and relationships to family, community and homelands. These are the foundational natural laws and powers of Indigenous communities since time immemorial” (2008, p. 121-121). This is why demands for restitution and the restoration of lands is crucial for the pursuit of Indigenous sovereignty but less so for non-Indigenous sovereignty.

## **Treaties**

The distinctiveness of Indigenous sovereignty as a concept can be understood in the light of differences between Indigenous and western understandings of treaty politics in Canada. Although, in government record, treaties between Indigenous peoples and the Crown were signed in the post Hudson Bay period, many would argue that Indigenous treaties existed many years before that (Craft, 2013, Corntassel, 2014; Simpson, 2008; Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992). The Government of Canada and the courts understand treaties between the Crown and Indigenous people to be “solemn agreements” that set out promises, obligations and benefits for both parties (Craft, 2013, p. 14). Between 1871 and 1921, the Crown entered into treaties with various First Nations that enabled the Canadian government to actively pursue agriculture, settlement and resource development of the Canadian West and the North (Fumoleau, 2004). Eleven “numbered” treaties were signed with this intention with Indigenous peoples living in Northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and parts of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and British Columbia (ibid).

Under these treaties, First Nations who occupied these territories gave up large areas of land to the Crown. In exchange, the treaties promised such things as reserve lands and

other benefits including farming, hunting and fishing equipment and animals, annual payments, ammunition, clothing and rights to hunt and fish on unoccupied Crown land (Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992; Fumoleau, 2004). The Crown also made some promises such as maintaining schools on reserves or providing teachers or educational help, support in housing and healthcare (Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992).

In reality, treaties were legal documents made to take over Indigenous territories. As Fumoleau (2004) states while discussing the consequences of Treaties 8 and 11,

The Indians were at a great disadvantage. They spent most of their time in the bush, without the opportunity to become familiar with the changes taking place around them... Many efforts were made to alert the Canadian public to the injustices which were being done to the northern Indians. But none of these efforts could halt the advance of prospectors and miners who were rolling back the northern frontier to the Arctic coast. Oil at the Norman Wells, uranium at Port Radium, and gold at Yellowknife occupied the attention of government and business. (p. xxviii)

The status of Indigenous peoples and how they have been affected by broken treaty promises in contemporary Canada include land claims, health care, education, housing, drinking water, and, of special relevance to this research, food (Palmer, 2011).

Scholars in the early anthropology and law literature suggest that the absence of European concepts of private land-ownership prevented Indigenous people from understanding the treaty process (Cumming & Mickenberg 1972, p. 123). Studies also indicate that Canada's treaty commitment was founded on the myth of Indigenous "cultural incapacity" where white people thought that Indigenous peoples were not culturally capable of treaty negotiation (Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992, p. 113). Yet, many argue that "native leaders demonstrated an apt understanding of their property rights and of their own objectives in the treaty-making process" (Friesen, 1987; Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992, p. 113). As

Morris (1971) documents Chief Ma-we-do-pe-nais' words while describing Treaty 3 negotiation:

The sound of the rustling of gold is under my feet where I stand; we have a rich country . . . where we stand upon is the Indians' property, and belongs to them . . . The whiteman has robbed us of our riches, and we don't wish to give them up again without getting something in their place. (Morris, 1971, p.55)

Deeply embedded in the notion of progress, civilizing the savages, weakening any impediments of growth, the Crown's promise of treaty was more perfunctory than a commitment of peaceful coexistence (Simpson, 2008). This marginalization included access to land and water and resources. As Usher, Tough & Galois (1992) state:

Hunting, trapping and fishing rights were no longer seen as fundamental guarantees of native livelihood, much less as a proprietary right, but rather as mere licenses or privileges granted at the Crown's pleasure. In the eyes of the Crown, these 'privileges' were not exclusive, did not bind or encumber third parties granted competing land or resource rights (such as timber, pasture, mining and fishing), and provided no remedy for nuisance, trespass or expropriation. (p. 121-122)

Additionally, the Crown's promise to keep this peaceful coexistence, 'as long as the sun shines and the rivers flow,' proved deceitful with growing industrial projects in Indigenous lands. Indigenous peoples were kept at a distance as the Crown economy expanded through river impoundments and diversions, deforestation, environmental contamination and resource depletion and as their prime food resources, fish and wildlife, became common property "protected" and regulated by the state on behalf of all citizens (Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992).

Logically, Indigenous scholars mark the western concept of "sovereignty," as an unsuitable concept for discussing sovereignty of land based people (Alfred 1999; Barker, 2005; Corntassel, 2008, 2014; Stark, 2013). They recommend the use of the term sovereignty

for Indigenous rights and reclamation movements, to take into account “the state’s imposition of control. By forcing the state to recognize major inconsistencies between its own principles and its treatment of Native people, the racism and contradiction inherent in settler states’ claimed authority over non-consenting peoples” has been identified (Alfred, 1999, p. 79). Alfred (1999, p. 81) notes that there is a tension between the use of sovereignty as a mechanism to advance Indigenous claims, Indigenous conceptualizations and enactments of politics, and Indigenous ability to utilize sovereignty without the sufficient capacity to do so. Hence, the settler state continues to recognize the rights of Indigenous nations to “be sovereign” while ignoring the fact that most Indigenous nations lack the capacity to “be sovereign.” According to Alfred (1999) such a relationship between the colonized and colonizer, based on recognition according to the terms set out by the colonizing state, forces Indigenous states to inhabit a “colonial structure and mindset” that is inherently destructive.

A more pronounced problematic that distinguishes Indigenous sovereignty from state sovereignty is the application of a rights-based approach as the deciding factor of indigeneity. As Corntassel writes, “Unfortunately, in the contemporary rights discourse, ‘indigeneity’ is legitimized and negotiated only as a set of state-derived individual rights aggregated into a community social context—a very different concept than that of collective rights pre-existing and independent of the state” (2008, p. 115). The state uses the Eurocentric universal human rights as the context for Indigenous rights and hence denies Indigenous cultural integrity. Many scholars contest the state use of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, arguing that by such application, Indigenous cultural integrity and sovereignty rights are clearly missing (Corntassel, 2007, 2008, 2012; Kulchyski, 2013). Kulchyski (2013) attests that, despite its political and legal value in the context of the rights of Indigenous people in Canada and worldwide, even the UN declaration can be interpreted as flawed. He states:

The Declaration posits a bifurcated world, with Indigenous people on one side as rights holders and the state on the other as duty bound. It is clear that forms of self-government are to exist within the existing state system. Although the Declaration places clear demands on states vis a vis their practices respecting Indigenous peoples, it also enforces the notion that Indigenous people are ultimately under the aegis or authority of existing national states, and there they must stay. Even aspirationally. (p. 62)

In contrast to the interest-oriented focus of liberal states with their emphasis on rights protection, Indigenous sovereignty focuses on community responsibility for place and the development of powers and capabilities required meeting those obligations (Corntassel, 2008, 2014; Simpson, 2008). It is here that Indigenous sovereignty relates to Indigenous rights of governance (Simpson, 2008). Thus, “Indigenous peoples have the rights to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities” (Corntassel, 2008, p. 122).

In short, the above-mentioned differences between these two concepts of sovereignty explain how and why the denial of Indigenous governance, knowledge, politics and relationship by the state has so adversely affected Indigenous health and well-being.

To counter the process, the state can stop the (so-called) positive collaboration (provisions of loans, partnership, infrastructure development) and bring meaningful revocation by resolving land claims and resource exploitation issues (Menser, 2014). Examples of such meaningful revocation can be found in Cuba’s state-supported food sovereignty system where government actively supports local farming, diverse cropping, farmer’s markets, urban community gardening etc. (Alvarez et al., 2006).

I have explored hunter gatherer’s mode of production framework to further analyze interest-oriented capitalist social order and settler food system. My interest lies in the

Indigenous food system and social order that is weaved in a culturally informed knowledge and livelihood system. The hunter gatherer mode of production is acknowledged by scholars primarily for its difference from the capitalist mode of production (Brody, 2000; Kulchyski, 2005; Ridington, 1982; Wolf, 1982). It is essential to mark this contrast to identify the strength of the hunter gatherer way of living and the cultural difference from western capitalist society. Within the backdrop of this thesis, I argue that the characteristic of the hunter gatherer mode of production is a strong factor behind Indigenous people's ability and potential to resist capitalist exploitation.

Hunter gatherer communities in the boreal forest area of northern Manitoba were primarily rooted in a specific ecocultural land base (Tough, 1996). In contemporary time despite having a mixed and complex economic system, they practice a culture and knowledge production system with responsibility towards the non-human landscape (Tough, 1983). In contrast, the capitalist mode of production is built on a profit-based system that does not care about the non-human landscape (Coulthard, 2014). It instead considers land as capital (Coulthard, 2014; Kulchyski, 2016). In fact, the capitalist mode of production operates as "one" totalizing force that attacks all social relations that oppose its hegemonic claim and "transforms the world into a set of forms conducive to accumulation of capital" (Kulchyski 1992, 2016, p. 42). In simpler language, the capitalist mode of production has a profit and control focus, while the hunter gatherer mode of production is relationship focused.

A relationship focused mode of production was first introduced by Karl Marx who made significant contributions to the knowledge of the change of social relations between people, materialistic nature of history and laws that govern the accumulation of surplus value (Harvey, 2003; Tucker, 1978). According to Marx, the economic base of a society is created from social and material productive forces and the relations of the productive forces (Harvey, 2003). Humans are the social productive force and material productive forces are the tools

and technologies that increase human productivity (Harvey, 2003). Production determines the social structure—the entirety of social processes that include reproduction of labour, means of production and relations of production (Kulchyski, 2005). Marx also argued that mode of production explains a way of life:

A mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and how they produce. (Marx & Engles, 1970, p.62)

The mode of production analysis helps understand the formation of social relationships that condition the terms of human life (Wolf, 1982). This framework is considered a critical tool analyzing the “totalization<sup>4</sup>” power of capitalism in human society (Kulchyski 1992, 2016) and helps us to comprehend “inter-systemic as well as intra-systemic relationships” (Wolf 1982, p. 76). In my point of view, it lends a much needed means to unfold the strength of a non-capitalist Indigenous world order.

Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. argues that an important difference between the Indigenous and western worldview of social relations (as interpreted in early Marxist understanding) is that the former explains social relations through relationship with land which revolve around place whereas the latter focuses on time/history. He says, “American Indians hold their lands—places—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind” (Deloria Jr. 2003, p.61). Dene scholar Glenn Coulthard (2012, 2014) addresses this difference arguing that the Indigenous struggle

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<sup>4</sup> The capitalist method of domination that transforms all non-capitalist relations to commodity and is practiced mostly over marginalized and the dispossessed (Kulchyski, 1992).

against capitalist imperialism can be best explained through the lens of land based relationships. Marxist scholar Peter Kulchyski (2015) also underlines a spatial dynamic:

[I]t is possible to argue that precisely what distinguishes anti-colonial struggles from the classic Marxist accounts of the working class is that oppression for the colonized is registered in the spatial dimension—as dispossession—whereas for workers, oppression is measured as exploitation, as the theft of time. (p. 88)

Kulchyski and Coulthard’s works underline differences represented by Indigenous worldviews that are in turn responsible for forming a different kind of social relations, hence distinct modes of production. Both scholars address the traits of an Indigenous worldview in their work and find the mode of production framework critical to the understanding of Indigenous resistance against continuing colonial capitalist politics in Canada (Coulthard, 2014; Kulchyski, 2016).

The hunter gatherer mode of production adds a deep nuance to the understanding of the mode of production. While discussing the political transition of Dene and Inuit hunting gathering communities in Canada, Kulchyski (2005) defines mode of production as a way of being which excels beyond the production focused organism. Kulchyski’s (2005) definition resonates with Marx, yet provides scope for deeper insights in sociocultural relationships:

A mode of production is not simply a way of making things, but equally implies a way of organizing human relations, ways of understanding and seeing. A mode of production refers to an intricately interconnected social totality where the moment of economic production, narrowly understood, is itself in part conditioned by the relations it conditions, and where even the notions of what constitutes the “economic,” like production itself, are themselves defined and acquire different status within the whole. (p. 38)

This “interconnected social totality” can be explained through the collective relationships of hunter gatherer societies. Studies have shown that hunter gatherer communities around the world nurture a culture where human and non-human take care of

each other to serve the one larger community (Brody, 2000; Ridington, 1982). People do not own the land but own the relationships which are translated through reciprocal actions such as sharing of food. In fact, in hunting communities with hierarchy, hunters are not allowed to own the harvest and they share it with community through cultural ceremonies sometimes referred to as potlatches (Brody 2000, p.185). Additionally, excessive accumulation of products is not feasible in the hunter gatherer mode of production system due to limited carrying weight (Kulchyski, 2005; Ridington, 1982). Hence the production system is formed based on ethical and mutual sharing not on the accumulation of surplus material (Ridington, 1982; Sahlin, 1972). This communal sharing and ownership practice in the hunter gatherer mode of production shapes egalitarianism in hunter gatherer societies (Barnard, 2004; Ridington, 1982).

This culture of egalitarianism is also reflected in gender relations. Feminist scholar Elenor Leacock (1981) argues that in hunter gatherer societies, gender roles are more balanced. Women as gatherers produce more food in most hunter gatherer communities and contribute more labour in the household; however, the “quality of that labour is substantially improved by its cooperative conditions” (Leacock, 1981 referred in Kulchyski 2005, p.48). Kulchyski (2015) attests to Leacock’s argument saying:

Gathering and hunting societies can be characterized as egalitarian in terms of gender relations; while women and men occupy clearly defined and differentiated social spheres, there is a balanced reciprocity between the two, rather than an order of hierarchy and subordination as prevails in other modes of production. (p.49)

Echoing Leacock, Kulchyski applies the term “gatherer-hunter” in his works (2005, 2016) emphasizing that a reversal of the term is informed by the value of women’s role in hunter gatherer society (ibid). The egalitarian mode of gatherer-hunter society features both

the communal sharing of resource and labour. Hence, contrary to the capitalist social order, the scope for social hierarchy is less prevalent in their society.

Another significant trait of the gatherer-hunter mode of production is the concept of wealth. While in capitalist notions, wealth is interpreted as abundance of material comfort, the gatherer-hunter society conceptualizes wealth with the equilibrium of meeting basic needs and having more free time (Kulchyski, 2005; Powlowska-Mainville & Kulchyski 2015; Sahlin 1972). Anthropologist Sahlin's (1972) monumental contribution on gatherer-hunter studies clearly underlines this idea of free time (Barnard, 2004; Kulchyski, 2005; Powlowska-Mainville & Kulchyski, 2015). He argues that gatherer-hunter communities prioritize the maximization of free time, contrary to maximizing accumulation of goods, and hence gatherer-hunters can be considered more affluent than other groups, for example agricultural societies (Sahlin, 1972). As Barnard (2004) indicates:

If affluence is measured in free time, hunter and gatherers are often more affluent than their agricultural neighbors. Except in times of scarcity, hunter gatherer populations need to spend only a few hours per day in subsistence-related activities, and they survive times of general severity, such as drought, better than neighboring agricultural peoples. (p. 3)

Like time, knowledge is also considered a valuable factor in the gatherer-hunter mode of production (Ridington, 1982). Knowledge, he argues, is the basic means of production for gatherer-hunter societies and "knowledge of environment is a genuine source of power that may enable people to regulate their relations to it" (p. 478). According to Ridington (1982), gatherer-hunter societies tend to be in human-environment relationships rather than taking control of the environment itself: "The possession of knowledge is more important than the possession of particular artifacts" (ibid, p.478).

This posits the gatherer-hunter mode of production as a highly trustworthy place, which naturalizes the anti-capitalistic mode of production in a most organic and

nonmaterialistic manner. It exercises a kind of “social relations and practices that are not just different, not just outdated, but possibly emancipatory” (Kulchyski, 1992, p.174). The system is well kept since time immemorial and continues to sustain itself with its “reflective knowledge of the struggle to embody egalitarian values in contemporary context” (Kulchyski, 2016, p.43).

The anti-capitalistic trait of the gatherer-hunter mode of production is more visible when it is compared with the agricultural mode of production. Referring to Brody’s (2000) work, Kulchyski (2005) argues that, the contrast is critical to showing the “defining feature of the cultural difference between ‘western’ and Aboriginal peoples” (p. 39) Additionally I would like to argue that this defining feature distinguishes the emphasis of Indigenous food sovereignty from the broader food sovereignty call that describes the global structuring of agro food, land management and livelihoods systems (Pimbert, 2009).

Agriculturalists produce food by changing natural ecosystems in a way that increases the amount of edible energy derived from the land (Brody, 2000). Gathering-hunting occurs in relatively unmodified ecosystems. As Lee (1979) argues, “Unlike food-producing people who must transform nature ‘to make it reproduce the way they want it to’, hunter gatherers ‘live more or less with nature as given’” (p. 117).

A reflection on nomadic and settler land use provides another significant argument. Generally, gatherer-hunters are marked as nomadic who migrate by nature, unlike agricultural people who settle and grow food (Brody, 2000). According to Brody’s (2000) interpretation, these groups function in the opposite manner. Brody (2000) sees hunters as settlers and agriculturalists as the nomadic group. He in fact, provides the much-needed colonial capitalist connection between religion and agricultural expansion, an essential point of view to realize the colonial land politics. Brody (2000) says:

Farmers appear to be settled, and hunters to be wanderers. Yet a look to how ways of life take shape across many generations reveals that it is the agriculturalists, with their commitment to specific farms and large numbers of children, who are forced to keep moving, resettling, colonizing new lands. Hunter gatherers, with their reliance on a single area, are profoundly settled. As a system, overtime, it is farming, not hunting, that generates “nomadism”. Agriculture evokes the curses of Genesis. (p. 86)

The key here is the perception of land use: how much extra land people need for subsistence and in what condition are they leaving it in.

Studies discussing the gatherer-hunter mode of production identify the settler agricultural mode of production as being more prone to a capitalist social order with visible social hierarchy, accumulation of wealth, gender division of labour, etc. (Brody 2000; Barnard 2004; Kulchyski 2005). The most striking problematic identified is accumulation by dispossession<sup>5</sup> of land, a characteristic of settler colonialism which provides the ticket for entry by capitalism into Indigenous territory (Brody 2000; Buckley, 1992; Carter, 1993). In fact, capitalist hegemony through dispossession of land affects Indigenous farmers (Bodley, 2008; Simon, 2011) and non-Indigenous farmers producing food on a small scale (Alonso Fradejas et al., 2015; Akram-Lodhi, 2015; Chatterjee, 2015). Brody’s (2000) work is noteworthy in this relation, he argues:

In one important way, hunters and farmers are not equals. Agricultural peoples, especially in the world’s rich nation-states, are numerous, immensely rich, well-armed and domineering. Hunter-gatherers are few in number, poor, self-effacing, and possess of little military strength. The farmers have it in their power to overwhelm hunter-gatherers, and they continue to do so in the few regions of the world where this domination is not already complete. Yet

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<sup>5</sup> A concept defined by the Marxist geographer David Harvey to analyze capitalist neoliberalist expansion in Western regions from the early 1970s to the present day. By accumulation by dispossession he understands accumulation/centralization of material wealth or land of the marginalized and commoners by dispossession to place power in the hands of few (Harvey 2003).

hunter-gatherers have experience and knowledge that must be recognized. Their genius is integral to human potential, their skills are appropriate to their lands and their rights are no less because their numbers are small. Political inequality, hostile and racist stereotypes, and conflicts of interest over land have created incomprehension and suspicion of the hunter-gatherer. (p. 7)

In the context of Indigenous communities in Canada, all of the above is true. The agricultural mode of production was introduced as an assimilationist and capitalist resource extraction strategy, and a way of achieving control and dominion over these resources (Carter, 1993). Although these territories have been colonized since the establishment of the fur trade and missionaries, it is the enactment of the Indian Act and Treaties that has drastically changed the entire land use system and used agriculture as a method to ostensibly ‘civilize’ the land based original peoples of Manitoba (Tough, 1983, 1996; Carter 1993).

In the Canadian prairies, agriculture was a primary tool of assimilation of the First Nations (Tough, 1996; Carter, 1993). Hayter Reed, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1893 - 1897), stated “that agriculture was the great panacea of what were perceived to be the ills of Canada’s Indians” (Carter, 1993, p.15). Reed implemented a number of discriminatory policies that were intended to reduce allocation of agricultural land for First Nations people and to increase control of white settlers over an agricultural economy (Carter, 1993; Buckley, 1992). The result was severe impoverishment of already commercially successful First Nation farmers who were forced to rely on a limited subsistence-level output (ibid).

Interestingly, Treaty 5<sup>6</sup> of northern Manitoba continued the land alienation process in a different manner. While it was claimed that these treaties were enacted to assist Indigenous

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<sup>6</sup> One of the land agreements between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples living in different location of Manitoba and signed at different times. More on treaties will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

peoples in making a transition from hunting and trapping to an agricultural economy, the hidden agenda was resource exploitation (Tough, 1996). The initial evaluation was that the land quality was not good enough for an agricultural economy (Tough, 1983, 1996). In fact, in 1873, two years before signing the Treaty, Governor Morris declared:

The country lying adjacent to Norway House is not adapted for agriculture purposes and that there is therefore no present necessity for the negotiation of any treaty with the Indian. (Morris, 1873 quoted in Tough, 1983, p. 4)

Despite this statement, Treaty 5 was signed and the land that had previously been considered as useless, was ultimately valued by the Queen for settlement of “her white children” (Tough 1983, p. 4). Referring to the land allocation politics in Treaty negotiations, Tough (1983) argues that the “complex motivation” of the government similarly reveals that “much of the land in Treaties 1 and 2 was not prime agricultural land” (p. 3). Clearly the government’s target was to use agriculture to open the door of exploitation for various industrial schemes in northern Manitoba (ibid, 3-5). In 1875, in the year of signing Treaty 5, Indigenous peoples from Norway House wanted to relocate to the south shore of Lake Winnipeg to get higher quality agricultural land. Governor Morris responded to this ‘reasoning’ saying that:

The progress of navigation by steamer on Lake Winnipeg, the establishment of Missions and of saw milling enterprises, the discovery of minerals on the shores and vicinity of the Lake as well as migration of the Norway House Indians all point to the necessity of the Treaty being made without delay. (Morris 1875 quoted in Tough 1983, p.5)

As Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (2014) documents, Treaty 5 was signed in 1875 with the promise to provide:

For each family, two hoes, one spade, one scythe and one axe; seed wheat, barley, oats and potatoes; for every ten families, one plow; for every 20 families, five harrows. Each Chief to receive for the use of the band: one yoke of oxen, one bull,

four cows, a chest of carpenter's tools, one handsaw, one auger, one cross-cut saw, one pit-saw, files and grindstone for the encouragement of the practice of agriculture.

These promises were not kept, as the Crown needed labour to expand resource-based industry. Indigenous farmer demands were suspended throughout the prairies and the settler agricultural industry received support from the government – modern equipment given to white farmers for surplus production (Tang, 2003). For Indigenous people, participation was achieved more by providing labour than by gaining ownership of land to produce food. As Tough (1996) says:

Migrant and Indian labour from the interlake was important to the province's grain economy. In the pre-mechanized agricultural economy of western Canada, Native labour was needed for harvesting and threshing. Many family farms benefitted from the availability of this affordable 'factor of production,' although this part of prairie history remains an untold story. (p. 217)

That said, in the post fur trade economy, agriculture was not entirely an undesirable practice for Indigenous peoples in northern Manitoba. Although gardening was introduced by Christian missionaries as a step towards 'civilization,' many Indigenous communities were successful in accepting and adapting subsistence gardening (Tough 1983, p.14). St. Peters, Norway House, The Pas, Fairford and Fort Alexander are names of such communities (ibid). During my stay in OPCN, I heard that other communities such as Nelson House, Oxford House, Brochet and OPCN also practiced subsistence gardening.

In northern Manitoba, the transition from a fur trade to an (non-indigenous) agriculture based economy followed the depletion of fur and game animals (Tough 1983, 1996). However, during and after the transition, it was fishing that gained more importance than gardening in the region (Tough, 1983). Subsistence fishing was more effective than gardening for sustaining Indigenous peoples - for its cultural worth but more so due to the demand of a growing commercial market for fresh water fish that boomed in the early 1900s (Tough, 1996, p.235). Fishing as both a subsistence and commercial economy was quietly

successful until the ‘invasion’ of hydroelectric dam projects began in northern Manitoba (Tough, 1996).

Being part of Treaty 5, OPCN, too, fell into the category of a government designated agriculture base economy (Waldram, 1988). Like many other community members in northern Manitoba, people of OPCN also did not receive the above mentioned resources that might have otherwise supported subsistence or commercial gardening in the community (Thompson et al., 2011). Hence, the gardening endeavors in OPCN remain comparatively unsuccessful. Additionally, the clay based soil and short growing season created further challenges (C. Stensgard, personal communication, June 12, 2012). I have seen three rototillers being damaged by the heavy and poorly aerated clay soil during my stays in OPCN. I have also seen many major gardening projects being launched through the school. But the most successful gardens were the community gardens initiated by the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program and summer camp gardens that support summer, land-based life, and its primary focus on fishing (H. Dysart, personal communication, July 22, 2013). There are only a few individuals who garden very successfully every year. Yet, until recently, the most direct intervention from the provincial government around local food production in OPCN remained focused on gardening and agriculture (H. Dysart, personal communication, August 9, 2014).

OPCN was one of the many communities who took fishing seriously after the fur trade regime. Since the Churchill River Diversion in 1975, the community has lost its previously high successful fishing economy (Waldram, 1988). It seems that OPCN members would prefer to take up hunting, gathering and fishing more than gardening as a mode of production based on cultural grounds (H. Dumas, personal communication, September 14, 2013). Compared to gardening, hunting, gathering and fishing provide more immediate results and a greater amount of food in less time—in Sahlin’s words, more free time. The

success in community gardening reflects OPCN's interest in the collective and communal nature of food production (Kamal et al., 2015). These are strengths of the hunter gatherer mode of production, traces of which can be found in contemporary OPCN livelihoods.

Indigenous mode of food production, whether it's hunting gathering or farming generates a more egalitarian distribution of resources and has a sharp distinction from industrial food system (Bharucha and Pretty, 2010; Demi, 2016). While literature on hunter gathered mode of production attest to this strength, a number of other scholarly work share the worth and uniqueness of Indigenous food system and how that varies from Industrial food system (Glieman, 1998, Demi, 2016). For instance, Iroquois known for three sister's crop had a food system where the culture of producing surplus food in a communal land was maintained to ensure no one starve in the village (Parker, 1910, p. 24).

### *2.1.3 The place of food*

Food is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior. (Barthes 1997, p. 21)

Scholars have identified the role of food as mediator to cultural practices, social bonds, spiritual enhancement, physical nourishment and, importantly, economic capitalization (Andree et al, 2014; Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011; Kuhnlein et al., 2009; Laduke, 2008; Levi-Strauss, 1966; Menser, 2014; Pieroni & Price, 2006; Shattuck, Schiavoni & VanGelder, 2015). The most pronounced concern for food scholars has been how the role of a food system is defined solely for economic growth overlooking increased inequity in food distribution and reproduction of power imbalances at multiple levels (Andree et al, 2014). Control over and access to food across history and cultures has often been a key link to overall social hierarchies and power relations (Holt-Gimenez & Shattuck, 2011). Access to food might be called the most basic human right, yet with the development of capitalism and

its handmaidens of colonialism, imperialism, and food commodification, access to food has become a key measure of power and powerlessness (Lappe & Collins, 1986). The hierarchies between First World and Third World, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, can be measured through different access to food (Demi, 2016; Shiva, 1991). Hence, for many, food is conceptualized as central to sustainable wellbeing, and food systems are considered intertwined with culture, politics, societies, economies, and ecosystems (Andree et al, 2014; Kamal et al., 2015; Morrison, 2011).

Although the commodification of food reached its peak through the establishment of the neoliberal market system, its origin can be traced through colonial processes and the rise of industrial agriculture (Mazhar, 2007). The British Opium War (Collingham, 2012), indigo production (Siddique, 2015) and British desire for tea (Andree et al, 2014, p. 33) are notable in the history of food colonization. The rise of industrial agriculture caused three changes in food system:

- a) Erosion of local and Indigenous knowledge by the application of western scientific knowledge (Andree et al, 2014).
- b) Population migration from rural to urban areas due to the use of machine based agriculture (Andree et al, 2014).
- c) Birth of the global south as the food grower for the whole world (Shiva, 1991).

This change through industrial agriculture that was initiated in the 1950s is generally referred to as the first green revolution (Andree et al, 2014, p. 33). According to Grenier (1998), “The green revolution resulted in ecological deterioration, economic decline (at the local level), poorer diets and nutritional losses resulting from the eradication of traditional foods or from their substitution by nontraditional foods” (p.8).

Scholars define the introduction of GMO agriculture through the Gates foundation as the second green revolution, which continued the above mentioned damages and with additional irreplaceable damages such as causing health hazards, loss of indigenous plants and mass farmer suicide (Shiva, 1991; Via Campesina, 2009; Andree et al., 2014; Menser, 2014). Food scholars are particularly indebted to post development theorists for their analytical frameworks, particularly Vandana Shiva who has a vast body of work unmasking the ugly face of GMO politics by international corporates (Shiva, 2000, 2005).

The green revolution's aggression over the food system continued and is connected to visible swings in the global political economy (Wittman et al., 2010; Andree et al., 2014). It was during this period when the industrialized agro-based food production was taken to the next level by the corporatization of food production in the post-cold war era by the formation of corporation -led global governance (Shiva, 1991; Andree et al., 2014; Menser, 2014). The World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank are marked as responsible for supporting "neoliberal principles, through policies of stabilization, structural adjustment, and the promotion of liberalized trade and investment rules" (Shiva, 2000; Escobar, 1995; Andree et al, 2014, p. 33). The 1989 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, and more dramatically the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement advantaged corporate trade rights, in many aspects outmaneuvering state authority (Andree et al., 2014; Brodie, 2004; Gill, 2002; Menser, 2014). These internationally consolidated bodies are referred as "supra-state" agreements and work as regulating capitalist structures that "trump decisions of national democratic bodies" (Brodie, 2004, p. 20 quoted in Andree et al. 2014, p. 33).

Basically, the birth of international corporate bodies controlled the supply, quality and availability of food. Within this system, local food growers are bound to sell their food to the state-approved corporate body: so, farmers, fishermen, food growers and harvesters are

forced to sell their produce and forage to one company. In the early colonial period, these included the Massachusetts Bay Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the British East India Company—the powerful colonial<sup>7</sup> corporations that controlled the world trade economy at the time (Shiva, 1992). In the contemporary food world, there are hundreds of these corporations - notably Monsanto, McDonalds, Coca Cola, and Nestle to name a few - who are creating a global governance ethos and practice and justifying commercialization of Mother Earth including food, water, land and forest (Shiva, 1991, 1992). World corporate resource exploitation has similarly developed a grave resource-damaging history (Armstrong & Nettle, 2013; Khagram, 2005; Shiva, 1991, 1992, 2000). As contemporary westernized world food and energy systems function to continue this legacy of expropriation and control, they in turn contribute to deep health and wellness crises as the consequence of the corporate-led food system where issues of food quality, nutrition, fair distribution, cultural appropriation and resource depletion are heartlessly compromised (Zerbe, 2014).

This compromise affected the Indigenous peoples of the world the most. Indigenous people were doubly alienated as they were victims of both national and global political orders. As stated in the Kimberly Declaration:

Economic globalization constitutes one of the main obstacles for the recognition of the rights of Indigenous peoples. Transnational corporations and industrialized countries impose their global agenda on the negotiations and agreements of the United Nation system ... Unsustainable extraction, harvesting, production and consumption patterns lead to climate change, widespread pollution, and environmental destruction, evicting us from our

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that while the colonial invasion of the Global South (Third World) is known as exploitation colonialism as opposed to Canadian settler colonialism (Acemoglu, Johnson & Robinson, 2000), both kinds of colonialism were designed to exploit the local cultural and environmental resources.

lands and creating immense levels of poverty and disease. (Kimberley Declaration<sup>8</sup>, 2002)

The health of nature and the security of food were nurtured by Indigenous peoples of the world for centuries, and as mentioned in United Nations Development Program (2011, p. 54), the majority of the world's biodiversity flourishes on Indigenous terrain. According to Corntassel (2015, p. 65), this is not a "coincidence" but rather a fact that Indigenous sovereignty takes care of biodiversity and settler presence on Indigenous land impacts "Indigenous desertification, pollution and freshwater depletion" (ibid).

Contrary to the world's capitalist commercial order, Indigenous peoples conceptualize food as a mediator to sustain land-based relationships and to hone collective sociocultural experience (Kuhnlein et al., 2009; Kamal et al. 2015; Morrison, 2011). It is a component of life that is of much importance for its "nonmonetary value" (Kamal et al. 2015; Morrison, 2011; Simpson, 2008, 2011). Indigenous people around the world conceptualize food as medicine (Pieroni & Price, 2006; Kuhnlein et al. 2009), as a source of spirituality (Demi 2016; Simpson, 2008), as part of community (Brightman, 1993; Laduke, 2004, 2005; Menser, 2014) and, as importantly, an integral component when celebrating social bonds and cultural practices (Kamal et al 2015; Kuhnlein, Erasmus & Spigelski, 2009; Menser 2014; Morrison, 2011; Simpson, 2008) (Table 2-2).

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<sup>8</sup> Kimberley Declaration is a call to support Indigenous sovereignty and intellectual property rights. It was announced through the International Indigenous Peoples Summit on Sustainable Development at Khoi-San Territory Kimberley, South Africa, 20-23 August 2002.

**Table 2-1: Indigenous conceptualizations of food including medicine, spiritual growth, community, and sociocultural experience.**

Conceptualization	Literatures	Quote	Case study reference
Food as medicine	Messer, 1977, Pieroni and Price; Kuhnlein et al. 2009; Demi, 2016.	“Indigenous people never separated crops from weeds; in fact, all plants are either food or medicine. As a result there was no need to destroy plants as weeds. The term “weed” was probably derived from the European system of monocropping” (Demi, 2016, p. 3).	Research conducted with Indigenous peoples in the Amazon and Atlantic forest areas of Brazil shows that people are using “medicinal” fish to treat asthma, skin burn, cough, flu and bronchitis (Begossi, Hanazaki & Ramos, 2006, p.246).
Food for spiritual growth	Adelson, 2000; Simpson, 2008; Kuhnlein et al. 2009, Demi, 2016.	<p>“The dimensions of nature and culture that define a food system of an Indigenous culture contribute to the whole health picture of the individual and the community – not only physical health but also the emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of health, healing and protection from disease” (Kuhnlein, 2009, p.3).</p> <p>“Honour and respect our lives and our beings, in life and in death. Cease doing what offends our spirits. Do not waste our flesh. Preserve fields and forests for our homes. To show your commitments to these things and as a remembrance of the anguish you have brought upon us, always leave tobacco leaf from where you take us. Gifts are important to build our relationship once again” (Simpson, 2008, p.34).</p>	It is argued that <i>Nishnabee</i> people hunt responsibly with the belief that the spirit of the animal will come back to a hunter only when there a mutual respectful non-damaging exchange is occurring (Simpson, 2008).
Food as community	Messer, 2014, Mann, 2004, Laduke, 2005;	“For the Iroquois, squash, maize, and beans are not just the basis of healthy diet and a method of planting (intercropping) that maintains soil fertility, they are the community’s kin, the three sisters (Mann, 2004, p. 13-14 quoted in Messer, 2014, p. 62).	In native communities in North American, buffalo is respected as a brother because it sacrifices itself to feed the community. People used to wear “buffalo robe[s]” to sense the “flow of life from buffalo to men” (McHugh, 1972,117; Verbicky-Todd, 1984).

<b>Conceptualization</b>	<b>Literatures</b>	<b>Quote</b>	<b>Case study reference</b>
Food for sociocultural experience	McHugh, 1972; Brightman, 1993; Simpson, 2000; 2008' 2011; Hart, 2010; Morrison, 2011; Kamal et al. 2015a, Kamal et al. 2015b; Shattuck, Schiavoni & VanGelder, 2015	Indigenous food practices engage people and their worlds in a complex web that weaves together people and their foods within a broader set of relationships, cultural expressions and responsibilities. And as Inuit, Anishinabek and Bininj cases attest, these connections are not operating in some purist, historic, 'pre-contact' condition, but are integral to contemporary lives of Indigenous people who dwell in intersecting westernized and Indigenous contexts (Panelli and Tipa, 2009, p.457).	A case study from New Zealand's Maori population interprets the word Mahinga Kai, which means 'food works.' It refers to a complex set of actions that gives the "ability to access the resource, the site where gathering occurs, the act of gathering and using the resource, and the presence and good health of resources. (Panelli and Tipa, 2009, p. 459).

Using these approaches, the term Indigenous food sovereignty can be situated in a political context — an understanding that places Indigenous food discourse in cultural practice, historical awareness and ecological underpinning. My intention of the elaboration of these three words—Indigenous, food and sovereignty—was to explore the implications of the significance of Indigenous food sovereignty for Indigenous rights and reclamation movements worldwide and in Canada. The following segment will focus on the history of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, with a particular focus on Canada.

## ***2.2 Indigenous Food Sovereignty as a Political Movement***

To understand the trajectory of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, it is important to look at the relevant discourses on food security and food sovereignty. The phrase “food security” became a common concern after the world food conference in 1974, almost three decades after the green revolution started to aggressively undermine food systems around the world. Arguably, the concept defines world food crises in terms of supply and demand, deficit factors and takes a more technical approach than a rights-based approach (Demi, 2016). In 1986, the World Bank defined food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for active life” (World Bank, 1986). Although the definition presented a very simplified idea of having access to food, it did not make any mention of the structural factors that underlie food security or of global politics. Having access to good quality food and having the financial capacity to buy food do not secure relationships with food. In part because of these oversights, world food security continues to decline each year (Demi, 2016; FAO, 2008). Paying attention to corporate control over food and the artificial food shortage (Suschnigg, 2012), a United Nations Senator once argued “food security in the hands of private firms is no food security; for private firms are there to make profit but not to feed people.” A former public health attorney, Michele Simon, also registered his frustrations when he observed: “Like water (and unlike most other commodities such as toys or

electronics) food is indispensable and a basic human right. Why have we turned its production over to private interests? Shouldn't at least some aspects of society remain off limits to corporate controls?" (Simon, 2006, p.318).

Suschnigg (2012) marks two basic approaches to food security-anti-poverty line and food sovereignty. From an anti-poverty approach, affordability of food is challenged by poverty and lack of financial resources. A food sovereignty approach frames the anti-poverty approach as limited and argues that the food security issue needs to go beyond just poverty and needs to consider social, cultural and political factors (Kamal et al., 2015; Menser, 2014; Witman & Desmarais, 2014). Hence, a food sovereignty approach brings in major questions on culturally appropriate food, local control of production, consumption and distribution of food, access of food in an ecologically sound manner, access of food by marginalized population including women, Indigenous peoples and landless farmers (Patel, 2009; Witman, 2010). The food sovereignty concept was launched from a social movement platform by La Vía Campesina in 2007 and has since emerged as a politically significant transnational food justice movement around the world, particularly for the peasant farmers (Desmarais, 2008). As a social movement, food sovereignty brought farmers' rights to the forefront and created an alternative discourse on the global agricultural trade, GMO food, seeds and people's rights to land (Boras, Edelman & Kay, 2008; Desmarais, 2012). As such, food sovereignty is defined as "the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produce through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and the right of the people to define their own food and agricultural systems. It puts the aspirations and the needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demand of the markets and corporations" (Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007 cited in Suschnigg, 2012, p. 227).

A review of the literature on Canada's social activist movements regarding food justice reveals that it was composed of a wide range of participants that includes civil society, local participation, government initiatives (Martin & Andree, 2014; Patel, 2009;), the expanding work of the People's Food Policy Project (a Canada-wide network to create food sovereignty policy through community mobilization), the Toronto Food Policy Council, the Canadian Department of Health and Welfare, and the Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program (Martin & Andree, 2014). However, only recently did these programs start to include deeper structural issues related to Indigenous food sovereignty as part of their movement even though it should have been an integral part of the food justice movement in Canada from its inception. Similarly, a survey of the literature shows that academic work towards Indigenous health and nutrition focuses mostly on technical and nutritional aspects of food as they relate to food security (e.g., Egeland, Pacey & Cao, 2006; McIntyre et al., 2000; Moffat, 1995; Tarasuk et al., 1998; Young et al, 2000) rather than a direct association of cultural and land rights aspects of food sovereignty (Grey & Patel, 2014; Kamal et al, 2015; Power, 2008; Morrison, 2011; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013).

The distinction between the food sovereignty movement and the Indigenous food sovereignty movement is that the former focuses on gaining sovereignty over food and the latter aims for cultural and socioeconomic sovereignty. Within this context, the discourses surrounding Indigenous food sovereignty are perceived to emerge along with or after the food sovereignty movement was launched from Via Campesina platform. Yet, the Indigenous people's movement for land-based food predates the Via Campesina call (Menser, 2014; p.69). Dawn Morrison (2011), director of the British Columbia Food System Network's (BCFN) Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS), provides an Indigenous conceptualization of food sovereignty, which includes the following themes:

- 1) Sacred or divine sovereignty: Food is a gift from the Creator ... Indigenous food

sovereignty is ... achieved by upholding our sacred responsibility to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food.

- 2) Participation: Indigenous food sovereignty is ... based on “action,” or the day to day practice of nurturing healthy relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide us with our food.
- 3) Self-determination: refer[ring] to the freedom to respond to our own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods [and] freedom from dependence on grocery stores or corporately controlled food production, distribution and consumption in industrialized economies (p 100).

Within this context, Morrison’s conceptualization shows that food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples can be achieved if their relationship with ecocultural community (land, water, human and non-human beings) is undisturbed. Yet, as discussed above, food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples is constrained by legal restriction on harvesting food (Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992), local consumption of (uninspected) traditional food (Thompson et al, 2012), industrial contamination of traditional foods (McLachlan, 2014), and the colonized occupation of Indigenous land (Corntassel, 2014; Morrison, 2011; Simpson, 2008).

In Canada, Indigenous peoples are victimized by low-quality and costly food, poor access to culturally appropriate food and limited access to government support (Cunningham, 2009; Damman et al. 2008; Kunhlein et a., 2013; Morrison, 2011; Northern Food Price Steering Committee, 2003; Power, 2008; Thompson et al. 2011). Indigenous people living in remote northern communities experience these challenges more than communities living close to cosmopolitan areas and with road access (Thompson et al, 2011, Thompson et al.

2012). In 2003, the Northern Food Price Project Report demonstrated major concern over the high cost of food and food security issues in northern Manitoba remote communities:

This concern is related to the nutritional health and food security of northern citizens. The purpose was further defined to focus on one specific aspect of the issue: strategic options that could reduce the retail price of nutritious foods to northern citizens. The focus was on nutritious foods such as milk and milk products, including infant formula and lactose-reduced products, fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, whole grains and staples. (p. i)

Although the Northern Food Price report resulted in the establishment of a number of government and nongovernment organizations working on food-related projects across northern Manitoba, such as gardening and ‘fill the freezer’ programs (Thompson et al., 2011); the success of these programs was undermined by a lack of adequate communication and partnerships with communities that failed to account for political and cultural differences (Thompson et al, 2012, p. 60).

Whilst a number of government initiatives (e.g., the Food Mail program starting in 1960 that subsidized freight through Canada Post, the Nutrition North program starting in 2011 that subsidized groceries including food and other necessary everyday items) failed to provide solutions to food crises in remote communities (Galloway, 2014), inadequate attention to Indigenous people living in urban communities, with little access to healthy food and who were often isolated from land based culture and community, further undermined food sovereignty for Indigenous people in Canada (Mos et al., 2004; Willows, 2005).

Hence Indigenous food sovereignty scholars and activists have prioritized the policy aspect of food sovereignty. As Morrison (2011) attests:

Indigenous food sovereignty attempts to reconcile Indigenous food and cultural values with colonial laws, policies and mainstream economic activities. It thereby provides a restorative framework for a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach to policy reform in forestry, fisheries, rangeland,

environmental conservation, health, agriculture as well as rural and community development (p. 101).

Meaningful vision and practice of Indigenous food sovereignty comes from Indigenous community based programs framed in cultural values and land rights (Altieri et al., 2012; Gombay, 2010; Kamal et al., 2015; Kuhnlein et al. 2013; Shattuck, Schiavone & VanGelder, 2015). The following section will discuss Indigenous food sovereignty in relation to community- based practice.

### ***2.3 Indigenous Food Sovereignty as a Vehicle for Wise Practice***

Community Economic Development can be perceived as “a process by which communities can initiate and generate their own solutions to their common economic problems and thereby build long-term community capacity and foster the integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives” (McRobie & Ross, 1987, p. 1). Although it is said that the approach grew as a movement in response to neoliberal capitalism in the 1980s in Canada, the United States and the U.K., its association with capitalist economic development remains constant (Escobar, 1995; Eversole, 2015). While discussing the misdeployment of community development, Eversole (2015) provide examples as follows:

In rural Australia, community groups often complain of suffering from ‘consultation fatigue’ after years of being invited to meetings with government representatives who are always keen to get their ‘input’ yet never appear to take it seriously. Other communities are ‘over researched’; their initial willingness to share knowledge about their community with outside researchers can turn to frustration when they find themselves repeatedly answering the same questions and still nothing changes—particularly when their knowledge is misused or misrepresented. (p.2)

For Indigenous communities in Canada and worldwide, the situation is the same, whereby development for communities is “forced” and “assimilationist in nature” and contains a “recurring theme” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 68-69; Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux,

2015, p. 32). As Newhouse (2006) explains, “Economic development is just the latest solution to the 'Indian problem': instead of needing civilizing, Aboriginals now need development” (p. 160). Drawn from his observation, the colonial mentality of governments and non-governmental development bodies undermine the growth of Indigenous knowledge and autonomous growth without outside support.

In Canada, Indigenous people demonstrate a long history of remarkable initiatives achieving culturally appropriate, community based development, yet the majority of these initiatives have been and continue to be undermined by colonial intervention. These include Corntassel’s (2014) reference to the Dene Declaration in the 70s where, “a number of community-scale initiatives were discussed and proposed, including a combination of locally operated manufacturing ventures, Native-run cooperatives, and worker-controlled enterprises” (p. 68). Despite having such a deep understanding of community cultural practice, the Dene Declaration was criticized by the Minister of Northern Affairs, Judd Buchanan as “gobbledegook that a grade ten student could have written in fifteen minutes” (quoted in Corntassel, 2014, p. 69).

Alfred and Corntassel (2005) states that these kinds of colonial assumptions can be countered by a regenerative community-based approach. They suggest that Indigenous communities should “regenerate themselves to resist the effects of the contemporary colonial assault and renew politically and culturally” (p. 599). Hence the contemporary Indigenous understanding of community economic development comprises non-hierarchical, cultural, place-based, leadership-oriented, strength-based approaches to development where the community acts as decision makers while sharing knowledge with all partners (Voyageur, Brearley & Calliou, 2015; Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015). As Manuel and Posluns (1974) argue, “real community development can never take place without economic

development, but economic development without full local control is only another form of imperial conquest (quoted in Corntassel, 2014, p. 69).

One of the most recent concepts being used in Indigenous community development in Canada is “wise practice”. This term is introduced in the literature to replace the term ‘best practice’ (generally indicating the most suitable practice in the community that can be adopted and implicated for success of a program). Wise practice, in contrast, is defined as, “locally-appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable conditions” (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2010, p. 19). Wise practice does not rank practices as best or worst, it relies on wisdom and success of a particular community (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015, p. 43).

Indigenous community development is informed by culturally appropriate development and wise practice in an Indigenous community. First of all, the practice of wisdom in an Indigenous community is conducted by practice of leadership when passing on cultural knowledge to the younger generation with guidance from the Elders (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015; Hart, 2010; Kamal et al. 2015; Simpson, 2008, 2011). Secondly, Indigenous community-based development refers to strength instead of deficit and optimism instead of despair (Wuttunee, 2004). Strengths-based approaches contrast sharply with problem-based capacity building approaches and instead celebrate success and community relationships (Minkler, 2005). Thirdly, Indigenous approaches to community development build on existing strength, that is culture, rather than building on something new and foreign. A cultural approach to community development makes way for Indigenous knowledge and enhances local experience. Locating culture at the center of community development, enables scholars to define economic expansion as a “way of living” aimed at collective wellness (Calliou & Wesley-Esquimaux, 2015) and as ‘capitalism with a red (Indigenous) face’ (Newhouse, 2000; Champaigne, 2004; Calliou &

Wesley-Esquiaux, 2015). Within this context, Indigenous community economic development is associated with resurgence and resistance against an exclusively economic and profit-driven approach.

The practice of Indigenous food sovereignty at the community level is discussed in a number of recent studies in Canada (Davis, 2011; Kamal et al., 2015; Martens, 2015; Thompson et al, 2011; Thompson and Fieldhouse, 2012; Thompson et al, 2012; Thompson & Fullford, 2013; Thompson & Ballard, 2013; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Voyageur, Brearley & Calliou, 2015). Although, the many case studies featured in this work provide ample information and theoretical analysis regarding structural discrimination in relation to Indigenous sovereignty in Canada, very few, with the notable exception of Martens (2015), emphasize a strength-based approach. That said, together, these case studies help inform and promote wise practice, youth leadership, community led, strength based, cultural, place-based non-hierarchical food related programs in Indigenous communities.

In short, as rapid changes in the global political economy are affecting Indigenous communities in rapid and profound manner, Indigenous scholars argue that that the need for cultural regeneration is greater than ever (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Corntassel, 2012; Corntassel, 2014; Simpson, 2011). An Indigenous food sovereignty approach can provide that cultural space.

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### 3. Respect



**Figure 3-1: From left to right Elder Elder Juliet Spence, Asfia Gulrukh Kamal and Elder Rosalie Soulier (right)**

*You need to understand what we mean by respect. If you do not eat food with your community when you are invited in a funeral or a gathering, you are not showing respect. Eating food is saying prayers and sending wishes to your host and to the community. The same way if you are not helping your Elders or a family in need, you are not showing respect to your community. If you are breaking the branches of the tree for no reason, you are disrespecting the community.*

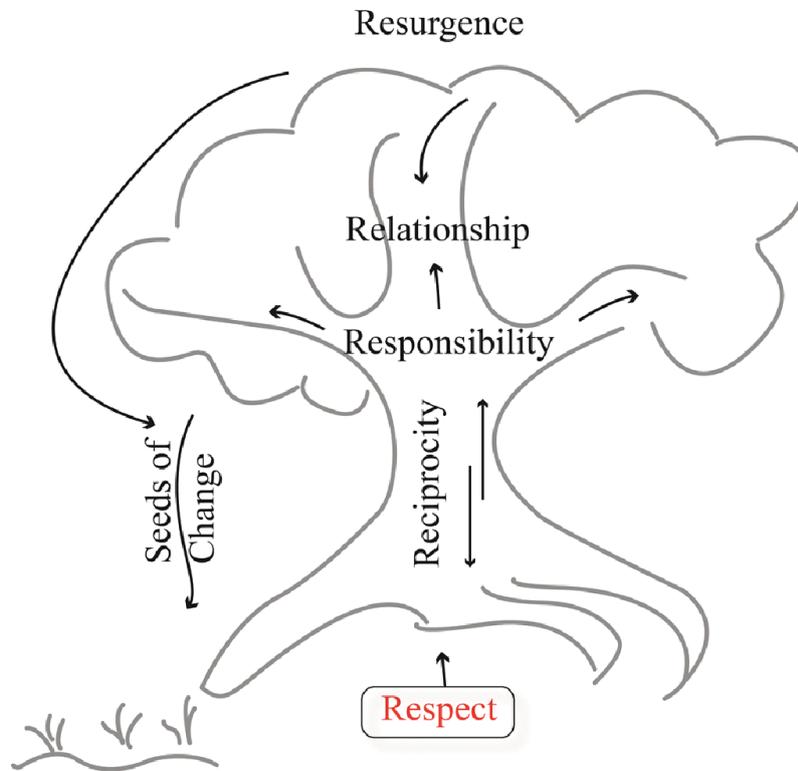
V. Moose, personal communication, May 19, 2013

## **The loon story: Keep your eyes open**

**Story teller: Barb Spence**

*Wisahkicahk was travelling and he saw some ducks, geese and loons flying. He started to plan, "What can I do to fool these birds and eat them?" He called the birds and asked, "Hello my friends, do you want to dance with my songs and party?" The birds were interested. They all started to dance by the fire. Wisahkicahk started to sing a special song and asked the birds to shut their eyes while he sings. When they all shut their eyes, he started to kill one at a time and put them in his bag. Slowly there were less birds and less noise in the crowd. The loon opened its eyes thinking, why is it so quiet here? The loon started to shout, "Brother, why are you killing them all?" Wisahkicahk kicked the loon in the legs as he escapes. That is why loons have flat feet.*

B. Spence, personal communication, July 19, 2013



**Figure 3-2: Tree of Knowledge (Respect)**

### Chapter Summary

All projects have a story to share—mine starts with the understanding of the significance of the word ‘respect’ in *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation* (OPCN). During my fieldwork I heard the word *kistihdiminowok*-which means we respect each other. Elder Florence Donkey explained in one of the community gatherings that respect is the core principle in OPCN that connects individuals with community and land and with the bond of respect. Respect is where everything should begin.

In Indigenous research, respect carries diverse and valuable meanings. Applications of the word respect include an ethical protocol to research, gaining trust, understanding the meaning of access in a community, learning not to ‘show off’ academic knowledge, learning to listen and, importantly, learning the principles of practicing culture while living with the collective. In short, understanding respect and acting upon it sows the seed of relationship in a research thread. From this, the tree of knowledge grows. The inclusion of the above quote and the story reflects an everyday narrative of OPCN that echoes the ethics of an Indigenous research paradigm. When I asked Barb Spence what is the relationship between respect and this story of the loon? She answered, “Do you not see the importance of alertness or clues of hunting techniques or practice of brotherhood even with enemies here? See, all of these lessons we learn from the animals in the story. I think what I am trying to say, in my thought since my childhood I learnt to understand about *kistohdiminowok* by learning to be mindful of many different things” (Barb Spence, personal communication, July 19, 2013).

In this chapter, I have shared my understanding and story of learning

*kistihdiminowok* and repositioning myself as a researcher and as a person. The chapter has two sections. The first is a discussion on the study location, the people and their knowledge history. The second is my personal experience that helped me grow as an individual and an attentive researcher, learning to understand lessons from the cultural stories. This chapter provides the background of the entire study and describes the significance of an Indigenous research paradigm in community based research.

## **Author's Acknowledgement**

My story of this healing ethnography stemmed from discussions with my committee member, Dr. Wanda Wuttunnee. Over the past several years, whenever I met her, she would tell me a story about how relationships are built in the Indigenous communities and what should be my learning focus while visiting the community. It was her spirit of positivity that helped me to get over my anxiety to share something personal with everyone and publish it in the Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development.

The narration was formed as I was sharing my experience with my friends in the Department of Native Studies, particularly Joe and Lydia who would ask me questions and spend hours listening to me. I am also thankful to Micheline, who took time to read the first draft of my personal narrative and gave me feedback.

A number of people in the community spent hours talking to me and sharing their own stories and sometime listening to my stories. They are the individuals who helped me with countless discussions and made me understand their thoughts on respect, reciprocity, relationship, responsibility, and resurgence. These interactions were deep and spontaneous. It would always start with a story and some jokes in Cree. I am very thankful to Hilda Dysart and Shirley Ducharme who patiently explained the Cree words to me. I would like to acknowledge Elder Vivian Moose, Elder Murdo Dysart, Roger Moose, Barb Spence, Rene Linklater, Kieth Anderson, and Carol Anderson for sharing their insights.

### ***3.1 The Land, the People and the Way of Knowing***

*O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN)* people are believed to be the descendants of the Rocky Cree people (Brightman, 1993). It is said that life for the *Asinikow Ithiniwak* (Rocky Cree) people revolved around the Missinipi or Churchill River for centuries, which holds many traditional resource areas and cultural landscapes with oral histories that transfer

knowledge through the generations (Brightman, 1993). *Asini* meaning rock, *asiniskow* refers to rocky or where there is a lot of rock and *ithiniwak* is people (Stichon, 2013). In English, they distinguish themselves from other nations as the Rocky Cree.

Knight and Kenny (1932, p. 161) referred to Great Water Lake as the home of the Meshinnepee in 1717. It is said that the great Water Lake was Southern Indian Lake (Brightman, 1993, p. 8-9). Also, Southern Indian Lake was known as Indian Lake during the time of Hudson's Bay trading (Brightman, 1993, p. 9).

Oral tradition describes Cree living in northern Manitoba from at least the 1200s (ibid). The Cree may, of course, have lived here much earlier than this. The weight of the evidence indicates that the Rocky Crees and other western Woods Cree groups are descendants of populations inhabiting the boreal forest west of the Nelson River and Lake Winnipeg for centuries before the introduction of the fur trade in the late 1600s (Brightman, 1993, p. 7-8). According to Elders in northern Manitoba, the Missinipi or Churchill River and its tributaries in western Canada from the Rocky Mountains to Hudson Bay mark the territory of the *Asiniskow Ithiniwak* who speak the "th" dialect of the Cree language (Stichon, 2013). The *Asiniskow Ithiniwak* people are known to be very assertive about their identity engraved in their language and their way of living (Brightman, 1993).

Rocky Cree ancestors are hunter-gatherers who as highly skilled hunters of game, as well as for the consumption of root vegetables and medicinal plants from the forest. Oral tradition says that they exchanged fur for different European goods used for everyday life, prior to the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company in the late 1600s. Upon the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company, "Crees rapidly defined themselves as dependent on such European manufactures as muskets, axes, metal knives, ice chisels, tobacco, tea, rum and

textiles,” replacing tools created with local products such as wood or stone (Brightman, 1993, p. 15).

Rocky Cree people hunted local wild game such as moose, barren land caribou, woodland caribou, and brown bears and trapped beavers, lynxes, porcupines and waterfowl (Brightman, 1993). Culturally, game was used for food and clothing (ibid). However, after the establishment of the Hudson’s Bay Company, animal furs (especially beaver, lynx, wolves, foxes, muskrats, and martens) were in high demand as a commodity (Brightman, 1993). Cree people were known as non-materialistic and for hunting sensibly despite the high demand for fur (Brightman, 1993; Tanner, 2014).

Besides household activities, women fished, collected berries and harvested medicinal plants in summer, and trapped game such as hares, ptarmigans, and martens. Elder Annie Spence (100) from OPCN recalled killing caribou and moose with a gun in the water. She said, “In our time food was plenty, we could hunt while we are cooking in our backyard or canoeing.” Annie’s mother, Late Elder Annie Moose, who lived for a good 113 years, was also known for her strength and leadership in the community. Lowry (1981) shares Annie’s active and independent role in the community in his book the *Unbeatable Breed*,

One spring I caught enough muskrats to buy a brand-new canoe. That was quite something and I was mighty proud as I paddled around the lakes. I used to love catching things—everything was free. Everybody had all they needed and they were happy. (p. 4).

The role of women in Cree communities is considered significant, particularly in the practice of collective childrearing. Even now in OPCN, the role of a grandmother is pivotal in any decision making including child upbringing and schooling. That being said, gender division of labor and violence against women in contemporary Cree communities are evident, many would argue, more so after the insertion of patriarchal state hegemony in the

communities. During the mid-1700s, it became a practice for Cree people to travel as a group from the Churchill River area to Hudson Bay coastal forts for summer trade.(Brightman, 1993).

However, this practice changed as by 1770 the Hudson's Bay Company created local trading posts to reduce the role of the middleman (Brightman, 1993) and to reduce competition with other trading companies. In 1799, Nelson House was established by Nelson Lake with two outposts at Reindeer Lake and Duck or Sisipuk Lake and operated as the major post of the district for Hudson's Bay until 1827. In 1805, the Hudson's Bay Company created another outpost called the "Indian Lake" post on Southern Indian Lake as an outpost of Nelson House (Brightman, 1993, p. 21). This outpost continued to operate until 1823 (ibid). Undoubtedly from the early colonial period, Southern Indian Lake was getting much attention for its abundance of resources. By the early twentieth century, Southern Indian Lake had become a small community with a relatively stable population (both Cree and Métis), most related to the community of Nelson House.

With the signing of Treaty Five in 1908, people living by Southern Indian Lake were encouraged to resettle at Nelson House, where a new reserve was created (Brightman, 1993; Waldram, 1988; Hoffman, 2008). Many chose to do so, but most preferred to live by Southern Indian Lake for the abundance of resources. Hence many people living in the community by Southern Indian Lake were registered under Nelson House Reserve (Hoffman, 2008). Growing social and economic crises on reserve were another prime reason for migration to the community of Southern Indian Lake. The abundance of natural resources and a healthy environment also attracted a number of non-Indigenous people to the community, who later created the Métis subgroup in the community by marrying Cree women (Brightman, 1993; Waldram, 1988; Hoffman, 2008).

In 1919, the Hudson's Bay Company took interest in the small but growing community by Southern Indian Lake and reopened an outpost in the area (Brightman, 1993). As this venture was successful for the company, in the late 1930s, a permanent post was created along Southern Indian Lake. This was the formal creation of the community of South Indian Lake. The situation later improved with the establishment of a commercial fishery in the community.

For many years, the economy of the community revolved around the trapping industry and the production of fish and animal products for food and other domestic uses. The commercial fishery was established in 1942 by a northern entrepreneur named Tomb Lamb (Brightman, 1993, p. 122). The fishery business in the community was very successful and many scholars argued that it was this new era of economic prosperity in the community that contributed to the sense of sovereignty among community members (Brightman, 1993; Waldram, 1984; 1988; Hoffman, 2008). As Brightman (1993) puts it, "When a fishing cooperative to replace Lamb's enterprise was established in the late 1960s, the aggressively self-reliant people of South Indian Lake found themselves on the verge of yet another progressive step."

By the mid-1950s, according to community members, the community of South Indian Lake had a school, a Hudson's Bay Company Store and an Office of Indian Affairs. There was a proposal for a new reserve called, *Ithino Sagahegan*, a plan that eventually was cancelled due to the construction of hydroelectricity projects across northern Manitoba (Kamal et al. 2015, p. 561). When the Churchill River Diversion (CRD) project was announced, community members were unaware of its grave social, economic and political implications for their lives and livelihoods. Without being registered as a reserve community and recognized by the government, this small group of people, unwilling to go back to the

Nelson House reserve, had no hope for compensation post flooding or for any sovereignty rights. As Waldram (1988) puts it:

When the news of the Churchill River Diversion Project first reached the residents, they were not especially concerned. Similar to the situations at Easterville, the scope and magnitude of the government's plans for the Churchill and Nelson rivers were incomprehensible to the people, and they ignored the whole idea. But, unlike the people of Easterville, the people of the South Indian Lake did not live on an Indian Reserve, and were "squatters" on provincial land in the eyes of the Manitoba government. They were thus on the verge of a political struggle that was even more incomprehensible than was the project that was to disrupt their lives. (p. 118)

Eventually, in 2005, the community of South Indian Lake was recognized as a reserve and was named as *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN) (Brightman, 1993; Waldram, 1988; Hoffman, 2008; Kamal et al., 2015).

Like many other Indigenous people around the world, OPCN dwellers believe that both human and non-human relations are equally important for community cultural wellbeing. Their way of understanding the world, consumption of food, sense of community, culture of sharing and gift giving and inherent respect towards all beings was parts and parcel of everyday life until the Churchill River Diversion project plan was implemented. It was a vibrant community led by many happy centenarians who had stories to tell, knowledge to pass on and many insights to share. Both cultural and political histories of the community are elaborated on in other chapters as well.

During the early stage of the Churchill River Diversion project and its implementation, much academic and scientific research was conducted providing arguments, logic and proof of the damaging effect of the hydro flooding in the community of South Indian Lake (Wagner, 1981; Hecky, 1984; Hecky and McCullough 1984; Hecky et al. 1984; Waldram, 1984; Ross and Usher, 1986). However, very few of these studies have included

insider perspectives or the deep cultural meaning of losing the land and its community. Research in and with Indigenous communities has evolved as a decolonizing paradigm over the last few decades (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008, Chilisa, 2012). However, this research must employ culturally sensitive and compassionate approaches, which take into consideration the issues and hopes of those who participate in the research (Smith, 1999). In a time of global uncertainty and crisis, a methodology of the heart that embraces an ethic of truth is needed that is grounded in love, care, hope and forgiveness (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 3). An Indigenous research paradigm has been emerging as a social and political movement that motivates and guides this research. My study is a modest attempt to incorporate some insider perspectives on these issues.

As a non-indigenous doctoral student involved in a community shared research project on food sovereignty with *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation, I attempt to approach research as a collaborator. By this, I mean connecting with the people I work with as a shared goal as well as respecting the validity of Indigenous knowledge—ways of knowing that are not familiar and are outside of my own comfort zone. My personal experience of conducting research with an Indigenous community is stated in the second section of this chapter. The following section of my discussion will shed light on an Indigenous research paradigm and methodologies chosen for this study.

### **Indigenous worldview and Indigenous knowledge**

Literature around the world describing Indigenous worldviews highlights a strong focus on people and entities coming together to help and support one another in their relationships (Smith, 1999; Simpson, 2000; Graham, 2002; Hart, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2010). An Indigenous worldview defines interconnected relationshipAs such,

Indigenous worldviews can be distinguished as relational worldviews (Graham, 2002; Wilson, 2008; Hart 2010, Kovach, 2009).

Key within a relational worldview is an “emphasis on spirit and spirituality and, in turn, a sense of communitism and respectful individualism” (Hart, 2010, p. 3). The term communitism means the practicing of familial bonds to exercise and create community (Weaver, 1997; Weaver, 2001, Hart, 2010). Respectful individualism refers to the sense of individual fulfilment in the practice of self-reliance that is considered successful when acknowledged by the collective (Gross, 2003; Hart, 2010). Both communitism and respectful individualism sustain a sacred and mutual relationship (Hart, 2010, p. 3). This idea is elaborated on further in the following discussion of Indigenous knowledge production, since Indigenous knowledge is the carrier of Indigenous worldview.

Indigenous knowledge is a unique knowledge system that is based on the practice of Indigenous worldview and is characterized as holistic (Wilson, 2008; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2010; Chilisa, 2012). Unlike the western knowledge system, it generates a composition of information and skills where science, religion, history, and culture are entwined and act as one (Hart, 2007; Hart 2010). As Hart (2007, p. 16) explains, “Unlike the positivistic empiricism paradigm that dominates Amer-European knowledge, Indigenous knowledge does not separate realities into disciplines, such as religion, philosophy, art, physical science and social science. Instead, these systems are often looked at and addressed together.”

Indigenous knowledge also reflects an individual’s interpretations and experiences. Henderson (2000) elaborates that the goal of Indigenous knowledge is to inspire everyday activities of people that synchronize nature. An Individual can gather knowledge by reflecting on the synchronized act, participating in ceremonies and cultural practices in different phases of her or his life (Cajete, 1999; Ermine, 1995). Similarly, on a social level,

Indigenous knowledge is place-based wisdom that holds a people and all its relations to a particular land (Cajete, 2000, 1999). It has a focus on “the web of relationships between humans, animals, plants, natural forces, spirits, and land forms in particular localities, as opposed to discovering particular ‘laws’” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 44). As such, land and the ecosystem itself is another key aspect of the holistic base of Indigenous knowledge.

Additionally, Indigenous knowledge does not separate science and spirit. Both physical and spiritual facts, realms and actions are considered as sacred and considered as one (Wilson, 2008). As stated by Ermine (1995), “The culture of the Aboriginal recognized and affirmed the spiritual through practical application of inner-space discoveries” (p. 110), or what Peat (1994) referred to as “experimentation of the mind (p. 251).

Significant to this guiding process are the Elders. Elders have taken the time to learn the practices and ceremonies of Indigenous ancestors and are seen by their community as knowledge holders (Hart 2007, 2010; Wilson, 2010; Kovach, 2009). Through apprenticeship-like training, Elders guide the transmission of Indigenous knowledge from previous generations to future generations. With their guidance and support, they facilitate learning through hands-on techniques and practices such as ceremonies, stories, and role modelling (Cajete, 1999). Thus, as the present reflection of generations of Indigenous knowledge, they are key links in the multigenerational aspects of Indigenous knowledge. Absolon (2011) articulates the following about Indigenous knowledge in her noteworthy work, *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know*, stating: “[W]e journey, we search, we converse, we process, we gather, we harvest, we make meaning, we do, we create, we transform, and we share what we know. Our Spirit walks with us on these journeys. Our ancestors accompany us” (p. 168). Absolon’s analysis emphasizes the role of Elders in foraging and sharing knowledge and the fact that “Indigenous ethics are implied in life itself and exercised through the teachings” (ibid, p. 25).

From this brief review of the literature on Indigenous knowledge, it can be said that such knowledge is holistic, personal or subjective, social or dependent upon inter-relations, and highly dependent upon local ecosystems. It is also inter-generational, incorporates the spiritual and physical and is heavily reliant on Elders to guide its development and transmission. The holistic and relational traits of Indigenous worldview and an Indigenous knowledge system make any principle crafted from its core, a living breathing entity. Research is a living breathing entity if it is grounded in Indigenous knowledge, the same way a treaty is a living breathing entity if it is written from the perspectives of Indigenous people (Craft, 2013). The question for a non-indigenous researcher however, is whether they can truly see from an Indigenous lens and whether they can “let go” of their authority as a researcher and reciprocate respectfully.

### **Indigenous Research Paradigms**

According to Wilson (2001), an Indigenous research paradigm can be defined as a “set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that goes together to guide people’s actions as to how they are going to go about doing their research” (p. 175). Since Indigenous knowledge is place-based and personal, its format can be fluid and varied in nature (Koster et al., 2012). However, there are some common principles of an Indigenous research paradigm that reflect on dialogue, on ethics, reciprocity, and relationship to create counter narratives on a colonial western research paradigm (Smith, 1999). The unique goal of an Indigenous research paradigm is not to nullify other paradigms, but rather to conduct research that produces authentic results without oppressing and misrepresenting Indigenous peoples and cultures (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Hart, 2010; Koster et al., 2012). Any discussion about an Indigenous research paradigm remains incomplete unless the inter-link between ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology is portrayed. Ontology, according to Chilisa (2011, p. 20) is “the essential characteristics of what it means to exist.”.

In contrast to the western research paradigm, an Indigenous research paradigm stands on the truth that is engraved in the reality of a relationship (ibid, p. 73). As Hart (2007, p. 7) explains, “How people see the world will influence their understanding of what exists, and vice versa.” Closely tied to ontology is the notion of epistemology that is based on the nature of knowledge and its truth – “holistic and shared with all creation” (Wilson, 2008, p. 84). According to Wilson, “Indigenous axiology is built upon the concept of relational accountability” (2008, p.77). In this regard, “being accountable to your relations” is the most important principle of research, even more essential than right/ wrong or qualitative/ quantitative (ibid, p. 77). Hart (2008) adds that relational accountability in Indigenous research can be practiced by listening and hearing with more than your ears, being reflexive and non-judgemental, understanding that physical and spiritual as well as logic and feeling are connected. He adds that one must acknowledge that conducting research means tying one’s subjective self to the process. How relational accountability is practised is what methodology teaches us; hence, it emerges as a “process” of being accountable to all relations (Wilson, 2008).

It is the methodology that helps create a research framework and guides us to pick the right tools to convey research ideas. Indigenous research frameworks can be many, but the common factor is relational accountability.

For example, four “R factors” are a common research framework founded on Indigenous research methodology. Louis’ (2007) 4-R- framework identifies: relational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation and rights and regulation as the pillars of Indigenous research (Louis, 2007, p. 133). Similarly, Harris and Wasilewski’s (2004) framework defines these as relationship, responsibility, reciprocity and redistribution. Shawn Wilson’s (2008) factors are respect, relevance, responsibility and reciprocity. These

frameworks suggest that whatever tools/methods a researcher is using, the chosen framework needs to rest on these four pillars..

Indigenous methodology inspires relational accountability also by including components on intergenerational knowledge production, leadership or Indigenous governance in a research framework. One such framework is deep listening. Deep listening describes a way of learning, working and togetherness that is informed by the concepts of community and reciprocity. It draws on every sense and every part of our being. Deep listening, “involves taking the time to develop relationships” and to “listen respectfully and responsibly” (Brearley, 2015, p. 91). It also means listening and observing oneself (Atkinson, 2001). The concept of deep listening is practiced in Ngangkuringkurr community, a Northern Territory in Australia (Brearley, 2015, p. 93). An Elder from the community says,

In our Aboriginal way, we learn to listen from our earliest days. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened. This was the normal way for us to learn—not by asking questions. We learnt by watching and listening, waiting and then acting. Our people have passed on this way of listening for over 40,000 years. (quoted in Brearley 2015, p. 93)

Deep listening is a concept is known for effective community-based practice leading to leadership. It is a “process of becoming present to ourselves, to each other and to the environment” ( *Brearley 2015, p. 93*). The practice of deep listening happens when community leaders who are “deep listeners” summon community members to participate and be cognizant of what is happening and emerging in the moment. This participation also means creating space for genuine contact. As Brearly (2015) states, the deep listening process “involves getting out of the way to open up a space in which genuine contact can be made. That space is a place of possibility, where current and emerging needs can be expressed and explored” (p. 94). The basic principles of a deep listening framework are a) respect towards all relations; b) investment of time in relationship while building trust; c) welcome creativity;

d) acknowledge knowledge as broad and deep; and e) quality of care that defines the harmony between work and relationship (ibid). The four R's of Indigenous research or deep listening give visual examples of what a meaningful Indigenous research framework might look like.

During my stay in OPCN, I was asked by Elders and other community members: “What is your purpose? Are you listening?” These questions helped me gain an understanding of Indigenous research ethics—the constant need to address and practice commitment to look after all relations within a collective society. While discussing our understanding and thoughts around food sovereignty, a number of Elders in the community mentioned a tree as a metaphor—a natural being that is rooted, that produces, reproduces and regenerates the life cycle. Eventually a tree of knowledge became our research framework, which I have used in the study in different chapters to elaborate relational accountability.

During my fieldwork, five different concepts were repeatedly mentioned by OPCN community members. They are: *kakiesipimatisihk* (the way we live, culture of a shared community), *kistihdiminwok* (we respect each other), *okanatawewoh* (we take care of Mother Nature), *Wichihituwin* (all things that help each other), *pasekonekewin* (taking someone by hand and helping the person stand). These concepts were visualized as a tree of knowledge that restores relationship. The tree shows how these components connect and bind OPCN culture together. This portrays the research cycle as a sacred path and ceremonial event—a living breathing entity that OPCN members can live and identify with. It is a process that creates a common ground and event of sharing, redistributing knowledge and achieving wellbeing. As Shawn Wilson (2008) puts it, “Therefore research itself is a sacred ceremony within an Indigenous research paradigm, as it is all about building relationships and bridging this sacred space” (p. 87).

Substituting the actions of searching, gathering, harvesting, creating, transforming, and sharing for the notions of fieldwork, informants, data collection, and the dissemination of research outcomes simultaneously centres the embodied dimension of the research process and the researcher's responsibility. In this regard, Chilisa (2012) points out that when “benefits accrue to both the communities researched and the researcher,” conducting research can be reconfigured as a two-way transformative process that she identifies as “reciprocal appropriation” (p. 22).

Logically, more meaningful collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers might create genuine space for shared opportunities if the aim is learning from each other and respectfully engaging in reciprocity. Absolon elaborates by emphasizing that “[t]he academy is being pressured to create space for Indigenous forms of knowledge production, and change is occurring,” which leads her to contend: “Without a doubt we continue to establish channels to have an impact on making Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing a solid methodological choice within the academy” (p. 166- 67). Indeed, this might be the genuine space for opportunity, for deep listening or practicing *kistihdiminowk*—a ceremonial ground where actions and outcomes are not predetermined but come as a relational progression based on respectful reciprocity, mutual collaboration leading towards individual and collective leadership, healing and wellbeing.

### **Reflection on the Shift**

It is important to have a discussion on what methods have I chosen to be a part of the ceremony. A method refers to the tool used to gather knowledge (Cresswell, 2009). Initially I had chosen participatory worldview and community based participatory action research for this study. Community based participatory research is an approach where “researchers, practitioners, and community members are to address the growing social disparities between

marginalized communities and those with greater social and economic resources” (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008, p. 61). The methodology is mostly used in health research and is increasingly used in research with Indigenous communities in Canada. Initially, my chosen methods for this study were participant observation, open-ended interviews, focus groups, case study analysis and a household food security survey to evaluate the food sovereignty program. However, at the end of the study my understanding of the subject and research worldview evolved towards an Indigenous research paradigm and I have chosen methods that suited community approved research activities and taken from both Indigenous and community based approaches as complementary methods. For example, I have chosen to couple interviews with deep listening<sup>9</sup>, participatory video with storytelling and focus groups with talking circles. The aim was to produce the best results by wise use of research tools, not for validity or superiority. As Wilson (2008) argues, “While Indigenous research may look to participatory action research (PAR) for support, this support is not for external validation but rather as a complementary framework for accepting the uniqueness of an Indigenous research” (p. 16).

Even though initially I had chosen to apply mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) in the study having the combination of both open-ended questions and a household survey, as my understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm grew, I chose to conduct this work as a qualitative study only. There were two major reasons for the shift: a) an Indigenous research paradigm supported the vision of the project as perceived by the community members whereby qualitative research was creating for the potential for new learning; b) community members were highly critical of the household food security survey

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<sup>9</sup> Even though deep listening is explained earlier as a framework, the concept of deep listening was also used as uninterrupted interview method, as suggested by community members.

questionnaire and there was not enough time to prepare a more relevant questionnaire to evaluate IMP.

For my strategies of inquiry, I had open dialogues with the *Ithinto Mechisowin* Committee, often with individual community participants and asked them to help me decide my methods of gathering information. While discussing these approaches with them I made sure to explain what I meant by methods of research. Discussions about study methods helped me understand the expectations from the informant-what do they expect from an interviewer during the interview and what will make them comfortable. In other words, I developed my strategies as I progressed towards my research goal. There was no one strategy or method that was fixed or that I knew would help me achieve the end results of this collaborative project.

**Table 3-1: An Indigenous research paradigm and strategy of inquiry**

<b>An Indigenous Research Paradigm</b>			
Strategy of Inquiry (qualitative and community-based)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory action research leading towards learning by doing— deep listening</li> <li>• Be flexible about research tools</li> <li>• Open dialogue with all participants about selected methods</li> </ul>		
Complimentary self-reflexive questions/framework	western Research Methodology	Suggestion from community	Indigenous ways of knowing
How do my methods help to build respectful relationship between the topic I am studying, myself as a researcher on multiple levels and with all participants?	Open ended interview	“Please tell us about yourself elaborately and then let us talk. Please listen when we are talking and do not question. Wait for the right moment to ask a question. Please have more than one session if needed. Both parties should connect meaningfully through this process”.	Deep listening
How are my methods helping me to understand and see relational accountability to all my relations?			
How are my methods helping this research to be reciprocal in knowledge sharing, following cultural, academic and policy regulations?	Focus group	“Let’s sit in a circle and everyone take turns expressing their thoughts. In every gathering/talking circle when we do this there will be different people moderating. We begin with a prayer and we will be respectful and not interrupt each other while talking”.	Talking circle
Am I doing the redistribution of research knowledge ethically?	Participatory Video	“We need to learn how to run the camera. We will decide what to record, we will interview and edit, taking a number of interviews to get a complete story of the subject. This includes story of Asfia, if needed”.	Storytelling

Thus, I have applied a combination of methods including interviews, talking circles, participatory video and storytelling in this research (Table 3-1). The application of a western research paradigm with an Indigenous research paradigm happened through a series of self-reflective questions refined with suggestions coming from community members prior to communication. Since my strategy of inquiry was not fixed, I grounded my work in an Indigenous research paradigm and kept community-based participatory research as a complementary component. At the end of my fieldwork, participatory video was particularly appreciated by OPCN members as a supportive tool to practice storytelling in the community.

In the context of research regulations, I have closely followed OCAP principles. The practice of OCAP principles in research with an Indigenous community ensures the ownership, control, access and possession of research data sharing is mutual and ethical (NAHO, 2007). Besides OCAP, this research also been approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board and the OPCN band council.

### ***3.2 Story of a Healing Ethnography in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation<sup>10</sup>***

For centuries, western research has been used as a tool to colonize Indigenous communities all over the world (Smith 1999; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith 2006; Wilson 2008). Research is known as a “dirty word” in many Indigenous communities for its continued legacy of manufacturing power imbalances by establishing one-sided methods of collecting and using information (Kaplan-Myrth 2007, 10). With contemporary Indigenous research paradigms, communities being “alienated” and “researched to death.” (Castellano 2004, 98; Chilisa & Tsheko, 2014). As a result of such concerns, in Canada, a number of ethics policies

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<sup>10</sup> Kamal, A. G. (2015) The Story of Healing with O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN), *The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, 9(2), 3-8.

and guidelines have been created in the past decade (Castleden, Morgan & Lamb, 2012). These guidelines suggest creating a participatory form of research where respect for cultural values and formation of new ideas can come from a reciprocated knowledge sharing process (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009). I am a graduate student. I have been trying to explore the social and cultural meaning of food in Indigenous communities in northern Manitoba for the past six years. From my past research experience, I realize that doing participatory ethnographic research requires being in the community by “actively taking part in the interactions at hand and to come closer to experiencing and understanding” their point of view (Hume & Mulcock, 2004, p.xi). In this paper, I would like to share my story of “being there” with *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation* (OPCN) and how research for me turned out to be a healing knowledge-sharing relationship based more on Indigenous strength than a method of “scientific colonization” (Kaplan-Myrth, 2007, 10). I will use the Indigenous storytelling method to bring a more nuanced, culturally reflective and personal understanding of my fieldwork experience.

### **The Story of Story-telling: An Indigenous Way**

[s]tories cement together generations of collective memory, embodying the historical, spiritual, social, and spatial.

(Davis, 2004, p.3)

Storytelling is one of the many well-accepted research methods in a contemporary Canadian Indigenous research paradigm (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Sium & Ritskes, 2013). The method is used to maintain and share intergenerational knowledge transmission and life experiences (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). This is often known as a practice of maintaining collective history through oral culture (McLeod, 2007). Sharing stories continues interconnected relationships between people, nature, and the spiritual world and the history and culture of the land (Cajete, 1999, p.131). In Cree narrative memory stories are lived

experiences expressed through fictions, dreams, and wit (McLeod, 2007). Here as I share my story, I juggle between my memories, dreams and engagement with local fictions, expressions, wit, language, emotions and wisdom.

My story starts in my homeland, Bangladesh. It is a Third World, tropical and overpopulated country. When I came to Canada a decade ago for graduate work, my stereotypical “romantic” impression of North America was built from popular TV shows like *McGyver*, *The Bill Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*, *Dallas*-- beautiful houses with trimmed lawns, clean neighborhoods, children making snowmen in winter, no slums, poverty or hunger and an abundance of resources distributed evenly to all, or at least better than in my country. To my surprise, in northern Manitoba I found a Fourth World (Manuel, 1974) carefully hidden within the so-called First World, Canada.

### **Knowing the Fourth World: A *Windigo* Story**

OPCN, a remote northern Manitoba Indigenous community located by Southern Indian Lake, was flooded due to the establishment of a hydroelectric dam by Manitoba Hydro in 1976 (Hoffman, 2008). The community was relocated from their ancestral territory to a nearby settlement with no proper housing, health facilities or transportation. When the community had moved, Manitoba Hydro burned down the houses in the old settlement, and flooding of the lake damaged their land based subsistent economy and access to wild food and most importantly connection to land (Waldram, 1985; Kamal et al., 2014).

I went to OPCN for the first time in 2009 to do a household food security survey for Dr. Shirley Thompson, University of Manitoba. I was shocked to see a community in Canada, only 12 hours away from a very privileged and very urban cosmopolitan Winnipeg, deprived of basic needs such as running water, healthy and affordable quality food, proper housing, health and educational services.

While doing my door-to-door visits for the survey, I noticed that community members were concerned about the survey being a stereotype method of “asking the same questions and reproducing the same answers” and “results never shared with the interviewee” kind of research. Conducting the survey in such a situation was difficult. They used to ask me, “Are you from the government? What is the purpose of this survey?” Throughout this process, I became aware that this intelligent, friendly and resilient group of people, who strive to go beyond “forced marginalization,” were deeply hurt by one-sided research practices.

During my early visits in OPCN, community members often expressed their social and political realities through local myths and stories. Keith Anderson, a bushman living in Leaf Rapids, who has a number of family members living in OPCN, shared a story with me,

Do you know the *Windigo* story? When I was a child I heard this story from my Elders that there is an evil spirit, a monster called *Windigo* that eats human flesh. It does not have any lips and when it comes near you, you will feel cold. When it bites you, you become a *Windigo*. *Windigo* was always hungry, it was never satisfied. I was scared. Now when I think of the story, I think of modern day *Windigo*—government as *Windigo*, hydro as *Windigo* or dark diseases in communities like alcoholism, diabetes or violence as *Windigo* (K. Anderson, Personal Communication August 11, 2009).

After I came back from my trip in 2009, I wanted to study the legend of *Windigo*, (also known as *whittigo*, *wittigo* in OPCN) in Canadian Indigenous culture. The literature helped me understand that the contemporary interpretations of *Windigo* stories are more so metaphoric adaptations of capitalistic expansion and cultural assimilation than just a simple local myth (Smallman, 2010). The metaphor has been used to explain the act of colonizer and the colonized, the former taking the sovereignty and the latter losing the sovereignty and reflecting respective behavior and symptoms of power imbalance. For me the question was clear, in this realm of colonizer and the colonized, whose side am I taking and what can I do to break this history of one-sided research? I was determined to find another opportunity to

go back to OPCN to participate in a fight against all kinds of *Windigo*, including unfair research methods and the concept of food insecurity.

### **Building Relationship with the Community: Voice of my Elder**

An offer from the doctoral program at the Natural Resources Institute at the University of Manitoba gave me another chance to address these concerns. I felt fortunate that OPCN wanted me to participate in their food related projects. My first few visits occurred before the official fieldwork began because I was invited to the community school to participate as a volunteer in a number of gardening workshops with Frontier School Division's Regional Gardening Coordinator, Chuck Stensgard. Working with young minds who were eager to learn and play and care for plants was a life-altering experience. My personal interaction with school students, teachers, elders, and interested adult gardeners during these workshops proved to be pivotal in winning the trust of the community. The youth started calling me "the garden lady."

I felt that OPCN member thoughts were articulate, and rich with allegorical meaning rooted in cultural principles. During a gardening workshop in 2010, Elder Vivian Moose expressed,

We are like insects; you squash them and forget about them. I feel bad if I hit someone while walking and I say sorry so many times. It is not our nature to harm others. Today I am sad because people are hurting us—our trees, eagles, beavers, medicines and everything else in the land related to our life. Our land teaches us to share and take care of things that are important to us. We do not harm another person so we get a better life. If you want to be in this community, you need to understand this. That is your journey (V. Moose, personal communication July 10, 2010).

My personal endeavor for understanding an Indigenous worldview and relationships grew deeper from this point onwards. The concept of worldviews has been described as

mental lenses that denote distinct ways of perceiving the world (Olsen, Lodwick, & Dunlap, 1992). Indigenous worldview influences “belief systems, decision making, assumptions, and modes of problem solving” (Hart, 2010, p. 2). Elder Vivian Moose’s quote reflects the concept of peaceful coexistence and non-interference as Indigenous worldview—a notion that is deeply embedded in the sense of egalitarianism and relationship with the collective (Little Bear, 2000). As an outsider and researcher, I recognized my participation needed to be guided and informed by this worldview.

### **Personal is Political: Familiarity and Strangeness in a New Home**

I started my fieldwork in OPCN in 2012. During my stay the more I interacted with people, the more I learnt about their values. For me it was a continuous process of dismantling and unlearning myself - am I scared of them, am I being respectful, am I listening the way I should be, am I being patient, am I trusting them enough with money, do I understand their jokes, am I using the right word while communicating, am I controlling and influencing their decisions, am I being helpful, am I being positive and smiling enough, am I sharing enough? These questions during different events and everyday activities became my practice of confronting a “researcher’s” self-supremacy. I do not know if it was because of this cautious behavior or my brown skin or my gardening workshops that I received acceptance in the community more easily than most white Canadians. When I asked during a focus group, Elder Emma Spence said, “We are happy to see you because you kept your promises, and you came back to the community.” Elder Thomas Spence said, “You never asked us to do anything, you came to visit us, stayed with us and then we started something together.” Elder Hilda Dysart said, “That is an easy answer, what you said made sense, you came to our gathering, you gardened with us, cooked for us, and ate food with us.” I realized I was accepted not because of my skin color but because of my repeated visits - for becoming part of their preferred memories and I was helping them to create some more—more

activities on the land. I understood research with an Indigenous community should be a constant effort to break the colonial worldview—that is, dismantling control, keeping promises, ignoring dichotomy and fighting violence against nature and human. For me the process started as soon as I started my journey to find myself within the collective in order to commit.

During my stay in OPCN, I have learnt the importance of respecting personal views as they connect people with their roots and memories of cultural practices. I am a woman of Bengali Muslim heritage. I grew up in a small residential public university campus located in a suburban town called Savar, near Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Savar is known for its lakes full of lotus and winter birds and natural green vegetation. My father was a Professor of Geography at the university. I lost my father at the age of eight. As an academic, he contributed significantly to the realm of geography and anthropology in our country. He died of medical maltreatment at the age of 48. He did a significant amount of rural development work. I have a few feeble memories of my father working with students in adult education and free cataract surgery programs offered for elders in a village near our house. As I grew up, I always wanted to be like him, doing something meaningful. After his death, my mother brought us up with love and care and to some extent with a secular ideology. Since my father died because of a doctor's mistake, my mother avoided doctors and relied on herbal medicines to cure us if we were sick. I grew up seeing my mother doing social work, trying to cope with loss after my father. My mother wanted us to learn sharing responsibility. She wanted us to study hard, be kind, be giving and respectful of others. She taught me to love food, local greens, herbs, fruits, rice and lots of fish. She prepares the best fish curry in the world. (However, there is a dispute, my advisor Steph says his mother in law makes the best fish curry in the world, so apparently, my mother is second best now).

In 2004 when I came to Canada for higher studies, it was my first experience away from my mother and my family. Initially I did not feel “at home” in Winnipeg. I missed my language, food, warm weather and familiar faces. My homesickness significantly contributed to my poor social skills, feelings of vulnerability, failure, inadequacy and unfamiliarity during the first five years of my stay in Winnipeg. This changed when I started to work with OPCN. I was amazed by the degree of community cultural wealth I encountered—people are warm and welcoming. They have vibrant language, colourful artistic minds and great aspirations for relationship. I realized wit, humour, funny expressions and jokes are an integral part of communication—these expressions explain trust, safety, fun, love of nature, intelligence. Once I asked my friend Gerald Dysart, “How did you cook the moose nose?” He said, “Oh, we fix it and boil the snot out of it!”

Before I started my fieldwork in OPCN, some Southerners told me that it was not a “safe” place for me. However my experience was the opposite. During my stay the most drunken man in the community, and supposedly the most unreliable as well, was concerned about my safety and walked me home. The children invited me to play with them, the Elders invited me to fix fish and make bannock for them, and adults invited me to go berry picking and to traditional gatherings. By the end of the second year, for Elder Annie Spence I was a friend, for Hilda Dysart I was a daughter, for Barb Spence I was family, for Jennifer Linklater, Ester Dysart, Gale Braun, Sandra Anderson and Carol Wood I was a sister, for little Leanne Wood I was an aunt, for Steve Ducharme, William Dysart and Bruce Tait, I was “*nichimus*” (sweet heart), for Rene Linklater I was a comrade, for Roger Moose I was a good listener, for Keith Anderson I was Little Beaver Foot, for Yovonne Michelle I was Princess Anastasia, for Vivian Moose I was Eagle Thunder Lady, for Mudro Dysart, Thomas Spence I was a girl in the town, and for many friends who were always happy and sitting by the store, I was a second wife (and they would not take no for an answer)—in short, I found a family

who loved me, fed me delicious fish, took care of me and wanted me to be a part of their lives. Summer in OPCN reminded me of my childhood, living in a community surrounded by water and lots of trees, fresh fish and taking herbal medicines. I felt at home in OPCN when I was requested to cook for the community for a funeral or a feast, or when I was requested to teach in healthy-eating workshops at the school and at the health complex with youth, Elders and single mothers.

### **The Other Side of the Coin: Dream of a Black Duck**

I had a dream at the end of my first year of fieldwork.

I am standing by Southern Indian Lake. There were many ducks swimming in the water. One of them was black. Suddenly the black duck started to drown. I was trying to save it, but I could not (journal, July 11, 2013).

My good friend Roger Moose came to visit me next morning and explained, “I think this means you will notice the other side of the coin now. Ask yourself... It will help you see your challenges.”

Now that I look back, I realize that my experience was a combination of familiarity and strangeness. The familiarity was in the culture and landscape of the community. And strangeness was embedded in my “class” identity. As a middle class Canadian immigrant woman, I am considered upper class in Bangladesh, someone who migrated to study “abroad.” I have never experienced hunger, acute poverty or racism, or lost my land or language, never saw all my belongings being burnt in front of my eyes - in Canada or in Bangladesh. After my doctoral degree, my class identity will go higher and be reaffirmed in Canadian and Bangladeshi society. On the contrary, it is possible the social and political setting in OPCN will not significantly and rapidly change, unless a miracle happens. During my stay, I heard stories about how someone’s house was broken into and the only thing stolen was food. This action, driven by hunger, shows that long term healing and major

changes in the political system, both local and provincial level, are necessary. That is why no matter how hard I try, it is quite impossible for me to comprehend what people in OPCN or anyone in any northern Manitoba Hydro-affected communities have been going through for the past several decades. This critical realization was a constant uncomfortable paradox of my field experience that even though I was loved and trusted dearly, I was an “outsider,” guilty of my socially constructed classed identity.

Long-term colonization in Indigenous communities in Canada has an effect on people’s mental health (Waldram, 2004, Adelson, 2005). Development induced damages such as flooding, mining and deforestation that occur on Indigenous territories in Canada results in social, cultural, economic and ecological collapse (Klein, 2013). The trauma is historic and causes continuous intergenerational, deep, destructive and unhealthy mindsets in the communities. During my stay, I observed sudden negative behaviours for example, self-hatred, anger, bitterness, anxiety, confusion, resentment, forgetfulness and unresponsiveness often visible in many community members. Personal and positive engagement with someone was difficult during such interactions. Silence spoke to me louder than words when during interviews people abruptly stopped talking because they did not have words to express their experience of loss and trauma. Such behaviours need to be perceived from a broader sociopolitical context. Events, incidents and expressions in a colonized community are considered an outcome of “interrelations of objective historical conditions,” as well as “human attitudes towards these conditions” (Fanon, 1986, 84). My personal interactions with individuals helped me understand that people’s behavior was the result of deeply internalized mental injury that has not been healed and looked-after (Waldram, 2004). A mother in the community once shared with me in a private meeting:

I live by this lake...it is flooded. My son drowned in this water in a boat accident. He was so young. Every time I look at this water, I feel lost. I cannot

go anywhere else because my job is here and I have to feed the rest of my family. But it is so difficult to learn to live this life... Something so close to my heart is gone forever.

She became quiet after saying this and avoided me for weeks after this meeting. In OPCN fluctuation of water levels caused constant erosion of land. Since the flooding, many islands on the lake were drowned creating massive accumulation of debris in the water. People riding boats often experience accidents and die because they are unable to see debris or the tip of a drowned tree.

The sense of collectivity and gaining strength from relationship in the community helped me to cope with the experience of struggle and grief I had to observe every day as part of living in an Indigenous reserve community. I understood everything in OPCN is translated through the idea of relationship based on the obligation of sharing—share pain, love, care, responsibility, knowledge, skills, food, home, land, water, plants, medicines and anything that contribute to people's wellbeing in OPCN. This idea is described with the word *Wichihituwin* which means something that can be used to help each other. Barb Spence said, "*Wichihituwin* could be boat, library, book, labour, skills and most importantly food." The expression reflects reciprocity culture in OPCN.

### **Nuances of Food: In Search for Deep Reciprocity**

The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine: not only for the body, but for the soul, for the spiritual connection to history, ancestors, and the land. (Laduke, 2005, p.210)

Simpson argues that colonial methods of extraction from the Indigenous people in Canada is cognitive, psychological, and intellectual extraction as much as it is economic (Klein, 2013). She suggests that this loss can be regained through "deep reciprocity" at the local level (ibid). She also argues that eating local food can be a way to counter such hegemonic influence (ibid). Thus, food as *Wichihituwin* plays a significant role to reconnect

OPCN people with the land and how they frame their thoughts for cultural and political regeneration.

Elders in OPCN told me not to leave a feast or a funeral without eating, since sharing and eating food at such events is a form of praying for the wellbeing of the community and individual. The practice is also common in my Bengali culture. As a child I remember in any religious gathering or prayer meet for a lost loved one, “*milad*,” my mother used to tell me to eat because eating in such a gathering is part of the prayer and paying respect to others. Most of my initial community outreach started by feeding people, personally and also by organizing gatherings for single parents, Elders and school children. Whenever I had meetings with community food champions, I tried to bring food for them—baked whitefish, multigrain bannock, soups, wholegrain blueberry muffins, yogurt, fruits etc. I also tried some multicultural cooking as I made curried beaver, fish and moose meat for some my friends few times. Steve Ducharme made fun of me saying, “You must be the first woman in the world cooking beaver curry!” After my first year, I evolved from garden lady to food lady for OPCN children and youth. I realized food effectively dissolves differences between insider/outsider and becomes a “profound medium of reciprocity, constituting meaningful relationships at different levels” (Lien, 2004, p. 9).

### **Building *Wichihituin: Ithinto Mechisowin* Program**

As part of my participatory activities in the community, OPCN requested me to work with them while they create their own food program. I began by offering help and participating in community events—providing cooking workshops, helping people to write proposals, gardening and listening to the elders by organizing focus groups and gatherings. The process helped to identify the key community food champions. We convened a group and named it the “*Ithinto Mechisowin*” (Food from the Land) Steering Committee. As a

committee we discussed the needs and wants of OPCN in regards to access to traditional food, we identified our priorities and shared them with supportive organizations in the community—the band office, the school, the health complex, the Community Association of South Indian Lake, South Indian Lake Environmental Steering Committee, the Fishermen’s and Trapper’s association. We did a presentation and submitted our proposal to all. To my surprise, despite some visible challenging relationship between the organizations influenced by small town politics, they all came together on this common platform and offered immediate in-kind support to jumpstart the program. My role ranged from coordinating meetings to finding a carpenter or ordering a material that was needed for program office renovation. I wrote proposals, met people, socialized and tried to learn how to be patient as a researcher. I went fishing with fishermen, learnt how to fix moose meat with the hunters and learnt how to make bannock from elders and heard stories about the significance of medicine, visions and dreams from many of the community members.

The second part of building our program was the renovation of a food program office space with proper food handling facilities. During this phase my tasks ranged from follow up on the renovation progress with the housing manager and carpenter to liaison with the health inspector for renovation guidelines and follow up visits. This was a most lengthy and eye opening process for me. Nothing happened in a remote Indigenous community in a timely manner. When I contacted people in the South to order materials on behalf of OPCN, a number of times I had to face racist, rude and derogatory responses and comments. Things get delayed causing late shipments, people being sick and sometimes delays were caused by weather and lack of money. The good part of this phase was, every morning at 8 am I had to stand by the band office to talk to a designated carpenter who would give me news on renovation progress. I had coffee with the group of carpenters and heard stories of

experiences of hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, legends of Big Foot or little people and much more.

The renovation was complete in June 2013 and we started to distribute food. By that time we already had a few hands-on youth winter fishing and trapping workshops arranged. We distributed the harvested food to single mothers, low income families, elders, diabetic patients and disabled individuals with less access to land based food. From June onwards we also received fish from many fishermen and some moose meat from hunters in the community as donations to run the food program. I remember working long hours with the volunteers, my sisters and grandmothers in OPCN. Volunteers shared stories from the old days, how life was simple and easy before the flooding, how grandmothers used to keep bowls of water while fixing fish, how berry picking was fun, how medicines were used and discarded in a safe place away from public places. I realized how land based culture is part of their “being alive well” (Adelson 2000). This understanding helped me to engage with the social and natural landscape meaningfully.

### ***kisthidimitowak*: Healing by Respecting Relationship**

Every summer I participated in traditional gatherings, called *Kiwikapawetan* and *Wassasihk*, for youth capacity building organized in the community’s old settlement which is not yet flooded. During the gathering my task was to record and learn different techniques of food preparation and collect food related stories for educational classes in the school. However, my participation in these gatherings was also a process of personal reflection as I was trying to learn from morale and solace found within wilderness. I was invited to sweat lodges and sharing circles and feasts. These ceremonies are meant for spiritual reflection on inner strength by focusing on self as part of collective where conversations, stories and songs are blended with personal experiences, prayers and cultural values.

During *Wassasihk*, I asked Roger Moose, “What is the significance of the songs you were singing?” He told me, “You need to listen to everyone. Listen to the bird, fish, plants, water and everyone else in your family, those who are alive and those who are not with us anymore. Listen to them well and make sure you understand and respect them so you can keep them well. That’s what our songs are about.” During *Kiwikapawetan*, Elder Florence Donkey shared, “We bond with each other in terms of respect—*kisthidimitowak* (they respect each other) is the word that describes our values, you respectfully acknowledge loss and gain, fear and courage.” I understood the meaning of this concept when I started acknowledging my own fear in OPCN terms.

In 2011, my mother had a stroke. She was partially paralyzed but recovered through a long 21-months recovery period. I started my fieldwork before she was fully recovered. I was always scared of losing her, having nightmares that she was in pain or she was falling from the bed when trying to get up. Yet, in my moments of distress, I was gaining insights – that how personal experiences and coping mechanisms are shaping the behavior of the entire community through the practice of *kisthidimitowak*. OPCN people were constantly dealing with fear as well—fear of hunger, cold, death of the loved ones and memories of abuse and many more. But they challenged and acknowledged fear by maintaining their aspiration for sustainable communitarian life. In OPCN everything is participatory from raising a child to harvesting and sharing food. My involvement in traditional gatherings and ceremonies took me to a shared space of collective healing where all personal experience is perceived as a communal experience. The bonding helped me ease my personal experiences of loss and fear. I felt relieved as I saw many people were praying for me and I was praying for them.

## **Conclusion: Repositioning Relationship in Research**

If we have been researched to death, maybe it's time we started researching ourselves back to life. An Elder (quoted in Castellano, 2004, p. 98).

In bringing this story to an end, I want to say that I had not realized until my participatory experiences how much one needed to engage in lived experience to personally and politically bind with any community. My involvement helped me redefine research as a process of personal reflection and political responsiveness based on cultural integrity. I observed participants engaged in this research project do their problem solving in a holistic manner that acknowledged that the entire systems of knowledge and relationships are interwoven. I thus argue that deep cultural reciprocity and relationship implemented through a community-centered and bottom-up approach can dismantle the practice of one-sided research. The *Ithinto Mechisowin* program created a platform where OPCN led the activities with comfort, authority and empowerment. Community-led participation brought in ownership and made the research intervention potentially viable. For the past two years OPCN has been successfully running the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program, training youth on harvesting food from the land and feeding wild food to those who cannot afford to harvest themselves.

By the time I ended my fieldwork, my identity as a trusted and adopted individual working with a Canadian Indigenous community was stronger than that of a South Asian middle class Muslim immigrant. Sharing my story using *pasekonekewin*, *Wichihituwin* and *kisthidimitowak* concepts helped me recapitulate how food connects complex webs of different relationships in an Indigenous community. I realized that the politics of food is the force behind structuring our thoughts about what are we eating, how are we eating and why are we eating the food we eat.

Using storytelling as a method of expression in this chapter helped me appreciate that the strength of the Indigenous way of knowledge sharing is in its spontaneous flow of explaining one's culturally and politically embedded social-self with ease. Storytelling helped me bridge and define my relationship with the self and the other. For OPCN members knowledge sharing and applying storytelling methods is used in a sociocultural framework. The practice encourages the need of each individual to become a contributing member of the community. My experience of self-doubt, discomfort, methodological anxieties for being simultaneously an insider and outsider, the joy of collective accomplishment and the suffering and fulfillment of being loved gave me insight that self-revelation is a quality that is essential for successful and sensitive ethnography in a community (Hume & Mullock, 2004, p. xxiv).

Ethnographic experiences vary from person to person. My experience was healing, educative and meaningful. I felt proud of being part of OPCN's food sovereignty program and the fact that they planned and completed a vision independently, initially with no financial resources from outside. In so doing, OPCN successfully reinvented their strength as an Indigenous community and their revived spirit of resilience to heal and help each other. The contemporary research trend is changing with the emergence of community driven and led research programs initiated by academics, non-academics and community. What I learnt from my experience is for a balanced and effective research intervention at the community level researchers should reposition themselves as learners and gain insights from Indigenous worldview.

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## 4. Reciprocity



**Figure 4-1: White fish from Southern Indian Lake**

*As we live, we care about others, that is how we grew up. Canada was built to take. Canada does not understand how much we are losing by compromising our culture and relationship. Hydro does not understand what water means for me and my children.*

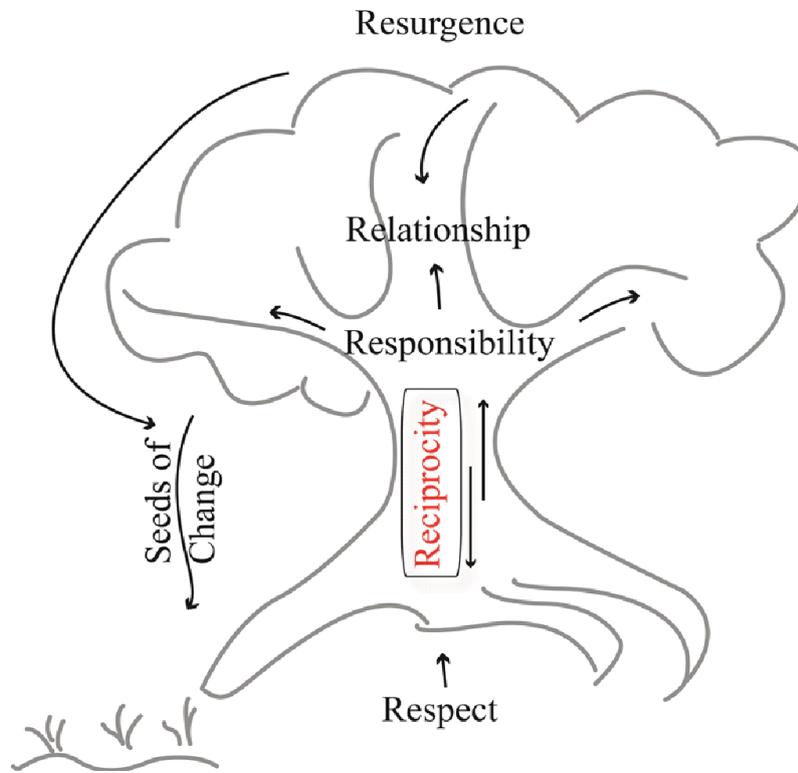
L. Dysart, personal communication, August 2, 2013.

## **The flood story: How the Land was Created**

**Story teller: Elder Vivian Moose**

*Once there was a great flood. All the land was flooded. The water was so high that Wisahkicahk had to climb on top of a mountain. He saw a muskrat coming. So he asked the muskrat to go down in the water and grab some mud. The muskrat went down and grabbed some water in its paw. But it was not enough. So he had to go into the water one more time and bring back some more mud. The Wisahkicahk took the mud in his hand and blew it hard and that is how the land was formed.*

V. Moose, personal communication, September 4, 2013



**Figure 4-2: Tree of Knowledge (Reciprocity)**

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I compose an Indigenous perspective of reciprocity between the human and non-human dimensions of nature. In so doing, the discussion sheds lights on impacts of (non-Indigenous) capitalist development and how this Indigenous world view differs in such a sharp way from a typically western understanding of nature. One of the key arguments that came out of this chapter is how the meaning of reciprocity between human and non-human beings stems from the idea of oneness—a river system is connected with water bodies, plants and communities that live and intermingle with and affect one another.

The creation story shared above symbolically reflects on this argument of oneness. It provides a picture where all character work as a team and take elements from nature to create the land. All the characters in the story are connected to each other so intricately that none can be discussed in isolation. As Elder Vivian Moose explained, “The creation of land was the creation of all our relationships” (V. Moose, personal communication, August 2, 2013).

In this chapter reciprocity is perceived in relation to the act of respect, the stem of the tree of knowledge that invites cultural sustenance from the roots and shares it with community and individual. At the same time, it acts as a food supply/cultural nourishment line and strengthens the roots. In one of my conversations with Elder Florence Donkey and Hilda Dysart in OPCN in 2013, I learnt that reciprocity is inherent in Cree culture. They told me the word *Okanatawewoh* means the act of taking care of Mother Nature. They told me there is no term or word for conservation officer in Cree. “In my thought a conservation officer is the person who cares about every element and being of the community, not someone who is a trained armed police to enforce law for protecting natural resources” (H. Dysart, personal communication, August 5, 2013). I learnt that the word *Okanatawewoh* is used as conservation officer to refer a person who takes care of Mother Nature and helps nurture a human-nature relationship based on deep and mutual reciprocity. Throughout the thesis, stories, narratives, food recipes and characters project the act of reciprocity. Hence, understanding reciprocity is integral to an understanding of the thesis.

## **Author's Acknowledgement**

The idea of the chapter came from a number of discussions that took place in my office with Joseph Dipple, a doctoral student at the Department of Native Studies who is also focusing his PhD research on the implications of hydropower for communities and environments in northern Manitoba. Both of us shared the same argument that it is important to link the OPCN story with broader water governance issues. I discussed the paper idea with OPCN community member Steve Ducharme and Leslie Dysart and started to write this draft. The draft was shared with Leslie Dysart and Steve Ducharme, who read it and reviewed it.

### ***4.1 Learning the Language of the River: Keeyask, the Churchill River Diversion, and O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation***

The Government of Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro have succeeded to what the Federal government and the Churches have failed to do in the last 500 years and that is the total and complete social, cultural and economic genocide of a very proud and independent group of people.

S. Ducharme, personal communication, October 9, 2013

## **Introduction**

A central argument about the largest dam regime in the world is that it is built on a hegemonic top-down economic development concept based on intensive exploitation of natural resources, sacrifice of cultural diversity, poverty, death and displacement in the name of progress (Shiva, 2002, p. 33). As of 2000, the official number of people displaced by the construction of hydroelectric dams worldwide is between 40 and 80 million. (Olagunju and Dara, 2014, p. 18)

Canada is ranked as one of the top ten dam builders in the world (Questions and Answers about Large Dams). Hydroelectric 'development' in Canada has been a state-led program that resulted in institutionalized social inequity and modernization at the cost of

Indigenous land and livelihoods (Kamal et al., 2015). The history of the hydroelectric industry in Canada is interpreted within the capitalist supply-demand framework, exploited through the construction of ‘mega-projects,’ often with little or no concern for issues such as environmental harm and social and community disruption (Kulchyski, 2012). Although the issues of environmental, social, and economic damage to Indigenous communities have been raised nationally and provincially many times, little has been changed regarding the impacts of such mega-projects (ibid). Construction of generating stations in the rivers in northern Manitoba has long-term cumulative effects on communities all along the river system and has affected a number of Indigenous communities (Hoffman, 2008, p.111). This fact will be analyzed in this chapter in reference to the political economy of resource extraction in Canada and northern Manitoba. This will follow a discussion of the history and implications of hydropower production in northern Manitoba, with a focus on *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation and the *Keeyask* project. We will continue the discussion with an analysis formulated from community insights. Finally, we will provide some suggestions, based again upon community recommendations, on the current and future of hydroelectric projects in northern Manitoba.

### **“Development,” The Murky Side of Water Governance**

Strategies for classical ‘development’ occurred in North America and worldwide after the Second World War (Escobar, 1995). The aim of the strategy was to construct a discriminatory world order with an underlying agenda of dividing the world between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped,” where the latter was exploited for industrialization, wage labour and raw materials, favourable to state orders, science and the capitalist market economy (Sachs, 1993, p.10). Indigenous people worldwide were engulfed by the demands of development and exploited by both the national and global corporate agenda (ibid). The result

was “ethnocide, genocide and ecocide” and the formation of a modern, global world order (Bodley, 2008, p. 10).

In the early development agenda, construction of large dams was justified as “an essential process of economic development” and a “means of combating poverty and malnutrition, and of assuring health, longevity and prosperity for all” (Goldsmith and Hildyard, 1984, p. 275). The scale of measuring economic development was/is the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita which means squeezing out more profit without thinking about fair distribution of economic growth (Pearse-Smith, 2014, p. 125).

Post-development theorists object to the idea of capitalist development, progress and production related to science, technology or economics and focus on whom these are serving or excluding and how they influence the construction of reality in the society (Escobar, 1995). They argue that defining development in terms of GDP limits the equitable sharing of quality of life for all (Pearse-Smith, 2014, p. 125). Their intention has been to redefine the world order of “development” through a grassroots perspective, to acknowledge “Indigenous peoples as a special source for learning how to live in harmony with nature” (Shiva, 2002, p. 18). In other words, post development truth-seekers cultivate concepts of degrowth instead of commodification; communal ownership instead of privatization; stewardship instead of waste, destruction or negligence and nature, culture instead of acculturation (Thompson, 2010).

Similarly, the concept of Indigenous sovereignty advocates for decentralization of the capitalist economy by practicing a holistic philosophy as a solution to the violence against Indigenous rights to water and land. A major principle of Indigenous sovereignty is to integrate Indigenous knowledge within its own rights, a knowledge system that is continuously living within the power of the collective as well as a relationship with nature

(Kamal et al., 2015) . This approach is defined through the interconnectedness between community members and nature (ibid). For example, water is inextricably connected to land, and human beings are dependent on the land and water systems. This brings an inherent responsibility towards the health of the river and wetlands. This worldview perceives a river system and all those living beings depending on the river system as part of an inalienable “one” community.

In Cree culture, wellbeing is introduced through concepts like *mino-pimatisiwin* (living a good life) and *miyupimaatisiun* (being alive well as a Cree) the unique perception of water stewardship as being alive well in relationship with nature defines Indigenous water governance (Hart, 2010).

Indigenous water governance objects to water diversions or extraction for the purpose of industrial and mega-development projects such as hydroelectric dams and large scale mining (Wagner, 2013).

On the contrary, the provincial and federal view of water governance defines a river system as a product which can be fragmented into many pieces to produce massive amount of electricity for international markets. Treaties, and policies are pronounced carefully and strategically to protect market interest. As Nowlan argues, Indigenous Customary Law practices in Canada are nothing but the “sleeping giant of water in western and northern Canada,” where treaties and land claims (and water rights) exist, but are not addressed (Nowlan, 2015).

At the international level, to start a discussion on water governance and Indigenous people’s right to water worldwide, in 2003, the World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan convened a session which was followed by a call to create an Indigenous Peoples Kyoto Water Declaration (Boelen, 2006, p. 16). Indigenous people’s representatives from Canada,

Central America, Mexico, South America, the Philippines, and the US reported many unjust policies of resource management, particularly regarding water. It was argued in the session that the “consultation process for any development project in Indigenous territory has been unfair. During the session, a Canadian delegate mentioned clearly that the Government of Canada is biased in the decision making process and how the word “consultation” is used to “tout obligatory transparency to stakeholders, but that Canada continues to effectively block any real participation by Indigenous people in decision making and by doing so masks ongoing appropriations of unceded natural resources” (Sam and Armstrong, 2013, p. 240).

In Canada, modernization of the British Columbia Water Act presents one such example. Originally the British Columbia Water Act carried Indigenous concepts of water stewardship. In 1997, the province’s Water Act was changed stating that “the aboriginal rights is a shared right that must be reconciled with the interests of the broader society” (ibid, p. 247). The statement is clearly a calculated denial of Indigenous rights of land and water use. Similarly, Manitoba’s Water Stewardship Division has confirmed the following objectives:

- “To ensure fair and equitable allocation of water
- To provide for optimal allocation of water within the sustainable limits of the resource base
- To assess and license appropriate hydro-electric proposals
- To provide clients with high quality, timely service and information
- To ensure that the potential for negative impacts of water power development projects are minimized” (Manitoba, Water Use Licensing, Water Stewardship Division, 2015).

Contrary to the written commitment, ongoing hydroelectric projects in northern Manitoba led by Manitoba Hydro and approved by the province show clear, direct

exploitation and commodification of water where none of the above-mentioned objectives are followed. The key question revolves around the difference in meaning between Indigenous water use from an Indigenous worldview or water law and the provincial and federal governments' definitions of water use as constructed in water legislation. Water governance in Canada is only taking the government use/definition of water rights where the scope for fair co-management is limited.

Indigenous water governance is a means of strength against Canadian colonial biased regulations and exclusion policies (Sam and Armstrong, 2013). In OPCN, the concept of water stewardship is shared through the word *kistihdiminak* which means “they respect each other.” The concept signifies the idea of oneness with nature by respecting and reciprocating with nature responsibly.

### **OPCN Community History**

Even though it is said that people used to live in the area surrounding Southern Indian Lake approximately 6000 years ago, a community was formed much later in the early nineteenth century and was named after the lake (Waldram, 1988, p.116 ). At the time of the treaty process in Manitoba, the community of South Indian Lake (SIL) was meant to receive reserve land, named *Ithinoway Sagahegan* (People's Lake), and benefits (Kamal et al. 2015). However, this plan never materialized and, in 1908, SIL residents were registered as members of the nearby community of Nelson House Cree Nation, now *Nisichawayasihk* Cree Nation (NCN), under Treaty 5 (Kamal et al., 2015).

In Canada, the initial conditions of Treaty agreement promised mutual benefit including Indigenous rights to trade, fish, and hunt on allocated reserve land, receive annual supplies of food, provisions, and ammunition from the Crown “as long as the sun shines above and the waters flow in the ocean” (Morris, 1971, p. 96). However, in reality, the

treaties were constructed under Canadian imperialist politics and the fact that water rights are not address in treaties “trigger questions in the legal grey area” of Indigenous statutory rights in Canada (Sam and Armstrong, 2013, p. 249).

People living around Southern Indian Lake were self-sufficient even after the treaty. In 1942 the establishment of a commercial fishery in the area supported the growth of a stable economy and culturally appropriate livelihoods which only changed after Manitoba Hydro rule (Hoffman, 2008, p. 112-113).

### **“Development” Politics of Churchill River Diversion**

In 1957, Canada’s Prime Minister Diefenbaker committed to, “developing the North for Canada’s future greatness” crowning the state as the natural and highest decision making authority ( p. 19). Diefenbaker’s commitment of promotion of economic development in the name of progress, sustainability or self-government in Indigenous communities has been the outcome of state initiated rapid urbanization and hydroelectric dams, mining and other development projects p. 19). Clearly northern Manitoba became the “gold mine” for Canada’s resource extracting industry (Hoffman, 2008).

Following the continued construction of hydropower stations in southern Manitoba, the provincial government began the process of establishing generating stations in the north, while also creating the Crown Corporation of Manitoba Hydro in the early 1960s. As the Grand Rapids generating stations was being completed, the government and Manitoba Hydro began the process of constructing the Kelsey generating station along the Nelson River (Manitoba Hydro, 2015). Completion of the Kelsey generating station brought about interest from the provincial government and Crown corporation. Consultants were hired and their report stated that the Nelson River had a steep slope towards Hudson’s Bay, making it ideal for hydroelectric power production. However, the Churchill River had a far more gradual

descent into the bay and was less capable of producing vast amounts of energy. However, the waters of the Churchill River were not destined to be ‘wasted,’ they could be diverted into the Nelson River through the Rat and Burntwood River systems. In order to accomplish this diversion, a control structure would be established at the northern outlet of Southern Indian Lake and the lake itself would be raised approximately 10 metres (Waldram, 1988, p. 118-119). Surprisingly, the Indigenous community at Southern Indian Lake was not informed of the project until the entire Manitoba public was informed.

Upon hearing the news of the proposed Churchill River Diversion, SIL began publicly opposing any such project. A counterpart in the south was found in faculty at the University of Manitoba, who consistently attacked the project based on its ramifications for both the community and the environment in the northern boreal forest. Ultimately, concerns about the project, the approaches taken by the provincial government, and other political maneuvers in support of passing the project and preventing injunctions brought about the downfall of Premier Duff Roblin and his Conservative government. Replacing Premier Roblin was the leader of the NDP, Premier Ed Schreyer. During the election, Schreyer promised the end the diversion project (McClullum & McClullum, 1975, p. 106-108). However, after being elected he stated that too much had been invested in the project at that point and it would continue, though the project would follow a lower level diversion with three metres of flooding (Waldram, 1988, p.119). This low-level diversion increased the water level by 8-10 feet, forced the relocation of half of SIL, with the ultimate outcome of forcing the relocation of the entire community as a result of relocated infrastructure (i.e., schools, nursing station, etc.) (Kamal et al., 2015).

Despite immense work put into opposing to this project, the community was unable to stop it. Following the completion of the Churchill River Diversion, five communities along the Nelson River came together, to form the Northern Flood Committee. This committee

represented the Indigenous communities of Nelson House, Norway House, York Landing, Split Lake, and Cross Lake and began efforts to directly address the provincial and federal governments as well as the Crown Corporation. Through immense efforts, the Northern Flood Committee could gain some concessions from the three opposing parties, including the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) (Waldram, 1988, p. 147). However, it is important to note that SIL was not a signatory to this document, as the community was not recognized as a band during this time period and only gained minimal support under the NFA for those community members who were members of Nelson House Cree Nation (Hoffman, 2008, p.117-119).

Ultimately, Manitoba Hydro and the provincial government took the approach of buying out the rights established in the Northern Flood Agreement through the introduction of Comprehensive Implementation Agreements. These agreements provided communities with a lump sum of money as a means of ‘implementing’ the promises of the Northern Flood Agreement. Of the five Northern Flood Committee communities, four signed implementation agreements during the 1990s. At this point in time, the only community to reject these agreements is the community at Cross Lake, known today as *Pimicikamak* Cree Nation (Kulchyski, 2013, p.140). Surprisingly, before signing the first Comprehensive Implementation Agreement with Split Lake Cree Nation in 1992, Manitoba Hydro had signed an agreement with SIL. In reality, this agreement was a Comprehensive Implementation Agreement with a community that was not considered a member of the Northern Flood Committee. Manitoba Hydro’s agreement with SIL amounted to approximately \$18 million in compensation for damages done in the past, present, and future. For the purpose of comparison, Split Lake received approximately \$45 million in compensation and other communities were able to negotiate in excess of \$70 million. Although it is impossible to truly compare the damage caused by hydroelectric power generation on different

communities throughout the north, it is quite clear that SIL suffered immense impacts as a result of CRD. Considering the loss of the fishery alone shows an immense lack of compensation, as this fishery was employing many in the community, providing capital, and supported the community's nutritional needs. Reviews of the damage caused by CRD brought consultants to the conclusion that SIL should have received a minimum of \$75 million in compensation (Waldram, 1999, p.71, 74).

Throughout the past 40 years, much has changed with hydroelectric generation in northern Manitoba. Currently, there are four generating stations along the Nelson River, a generating station and control structure at the northern outlet of Lake Winnipeg leading into the Nelson River, and a generating station on the Burntwood River (Generating Stations). The *Wuskwatim* generating station, the most recent project completed and the generating station mentioned earlier on the Burntwood River, is the first project Manitoba Hydro has built with their 'new' approach to relationships with First Nation communities. This project was built in partnership with *Nisichawayasihk* Cree Nation (NCN) (Wuskwatim Generating Station) Partnership agreements have become a new means through which Manitoba Hydro attempts to form positive relationships with communities being approached with proposed generating station projects.

### **Augmented Flow Program: License of Power**

In order for Manitoba Hydro to use Southern Indian Lake as a reservoir for the battery of generating stations it has constructed along the Nelson River system, a license was provided under the Water Power Act (Know History, 2015). This license obtained by Manitoba Hydro defines the parameters within which they are able to fluctuate and control the waters of Southern Indian Lake and the rest of the system. According to OPCN community members, the license granted Manitoba Hydro the ability to increase a maximum

of a two-foot drawdown of Southern Indian Lake during the course of a twelve month period. However, shortly after gaining this license, in 1986, Manitoba Hydro was provided with the “Augmented Flow Program” (AFP), a temporary license that gave them further control over the waters of Southern Indian Lake.<sup>11</sup> Through AFP, Hydro increased an additional six inches of flooding and two feet of drawdown for Southern Indian Lake, effectively changing the twelve-month fluctuation from two feet to 4.5 feet. Each year, the provincial government grants Manitoba Hydro’s request to operate under the Augmented Flow Program. Despite changes to a license that directly affects those living at Southern Indian Lake, the community was not consulted about the changes to the program (Ducharme, 2013). Community members have stated this changed their perception of the moral contract the community had with the provincial government.<sup>12</sup>

Now, after approximately 40 years of the interim Water Power Act license, Manitoba Hydro is attempting to gain a permanent license for operation of the Churchill River Diversion. However, this license is based not on the original parameters established under the Water Power Act, but instead the altered regulations for operation of the Augmented Flow Program. As far as the community can tell, no changes have been requested by Manitoba Hydro. This means no changes to a program that has effectively destroyed a sustainable economy through the collapse of North America’s second largest grade A whitefish fishery (Ducharme, 2013).

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<sup>11</sup> Steve Ducharme, Personal Interview, November 9, 2013

<sup>12</sup> Steve Ducharme, Personal Interview

## **The *Keeyask* Project**

Currently, Manitoba Hydro is constructing the *Keeyask* generating station. This project is in ‘partnership’ with four First Nation communities, allowing them to purchase up to 25% of the project (*Keeyask* and TNC). These four First Nations are *Tataskweyak* Cree Nation (formerly Split Lake Cree Nation), Fox Lake Cree Nation, York Factory First Nation, and War Lake First Nation. Throughout the years of 2013 and 2014, Manitoba Hydro gained all formal licensing necessary for the *Keeyask* Project, with public hearings held by the Clean Environment Commission of Manitoba and the Public Utilities Board and began construction in the summer of 2014 (*Keeyask* and TNC). Upon completion of the project, much of the energy produced by the *Keeyask* generating station will be sold to the United States, in particular Minnesota and Wisconsin (Kulchyski, 2013, p. 133).

The partnership for the *Keeyask* project was only proposed for those communities listed above. Communities upstream of the generating station will suffer consequences from this project, yet Manitoba Hydro has failed to consider including them in the partnership. Throughout the Clean Environment Commission hearings, it was obvious that the scientific research on environmental effects reviewed very narrow areas of the Nelson River, predominantly the areas that would be directly affected during construction and operation (Manitoba, Ministry of Conservation). Reviews such as this, and a failure to view the entire arsenal of Manitoba Hydro’s hydroelectric system as a cohesive whole, prevents a nuanced understanding of the multiple impacts of generating stations and power corridors. Southern Indian Lake is one of the ‘batteries’ that powers Manitoba Hydro’s arsenal, and any generating station constructed along the Nelson River affects the community of *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation.

## **Implications of *Keeyask* project: A Community (OPCN) Interpretation**

Hydroelectric megaprojects in Nelson River impacted the water regime of Lake Winnipeg, the Nelson and Churchill rivers, and connecting channels (Hoffman, 2008). Impacts over Indigenous communities ranged from loss of fishery habitat and production, contaminated fish species, flooding and persistent erosion and permafrost, loss of traditional food, community disruption and disintegration (Waldram, 1988). These effects were immediate, long lasting and in many cases permanent.

The social, cultural, economic and environmental impact of disruption, alteration, and fragmentation of a natural ecosystem of the rivers and lakes in northern Manitoba, can be properly assessed through acknowledging the destructive nature of these hydro projects and the vulnerability of the people who are exposed to it (Erickson and Vecsey, 1980, p.152). As Lahiri-Dutt (2000, p. 2396) argues, “all the technical solutions adopted to ‘control’ rivers curtailed the right of rivers to move over space, and this not only gave rise to a series of technical problems but immense political problems as well. What the river and its changing moods meant to those who lived in its basin, and to those who made technology choices for them, must therefore be understood as a first step.”

Although it is not directly apparent, OPCN community members predict that there are multitudes of ways in which the *Keeyask* project will have direct effects on OPCN population. Many of the effects described in this section are those perceived by community members who have a long-standing history with hydroelectric generation and the operating regimes of Manitoba Hydro. OPCN community members are referring to crosscutting issues related to flooding, climate change, food sovereignty, social and health disparities, a discussion that has been ongoing between hydrologist and social scientist for decades.

Elder William Dysart argues that since the entire boreal forest river system is interconnected, the damages to the riverine system are also correlated. He said, “The same way when CRD was constructed many communities, lakes and hunting and fishing areas were affected, *Keeyask* is going to either intensify the loss or keep it the same. It is not going to make things better for us.”<sup>13</sup> Calvin Baker and Leslie Dysart said, “Ecological risk is higher when the entire river system is damaged. The health of water influences weather, food, life cycle and the land quality- damming rivers is the easiest way to contaminate the entire cycle of life.”

Referring to the CRD experience, some community members argue that there will be a multitude of environmental impacts as a result of the *Keeyask* generating station. According to OPCN Elders, drastic change in the water system, caused by CRD construction and operation, triggered massive migrations of animals and a loss of freshwater fish populations. Extinction of porcupine, lower population of muskrats, martens and whitefish are examples these outcomes. Migration of moose populations and water fowl are significant in both the Churchill and Nelson River systems. Elder Thomas Spence said, “One thing people do not understand is the water quality is not the same anymore. Control of water flow changes the season or the adaptation cycle of everything living in the water, the fish do not taste the same.”<sup>14</sup>

Damming causes loss and change of vegetation in the area. Erosion of berry patches and medicinal plants are one of the major and direct damages that have happened in OPCN after flooding. This erosion and damaging of berry patches have been constant in both upstream and downstream areas of the Churchill and Nelson River systems. “People do not

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<sup>13</sup> William Dysart, Personal Interview, August 2, 2012

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Spence, Personal Interview, October 12, 2013

pick berries from one area only. Besides the flooded land, each year there are new areas that are being affected. There is no balance of how much rain or sun you might get and these are important factors for growth of berries and medicines.”<sup>15</sup>

Constant erosion of the land increases contamination and the amount of sediment. Leslie Dysart says, “People came in to study the mercury level in the water right after our community was flooded. We were informed that the use of this lake as a reservoir brings sediment with mercury which gets concentrated in fish. When we eat fish, we might get mercury in our body.”<sup>16</sup> Community members state that Manitoba Hydro claims there is no mercury in the water. However, they (community) have not received any recent research or reports as proof of the statements. Additionally, an OPCN fisherman shared, besides mercury contamination; there are other forms of ongoing water pollution occurring in the river system from the constant erosion and rotten debris in the water. The result is continuous contamination of food and pollution of water. This has direct implications for the riverine community as a whole, as community members rely upon wild food to support their diet.

A river system helps to maintain the social-cultural life of Indigenous communities. Harvesting berries in the late summer and early fall has been a popular social and cultural practice in Cree communities all over northern Manitoba. In the current situation, migration of hunting is not merely a nutritional problem, but also hampers the ability of communities to continue cultural and collective initiatives towards hunting and gathering activities. “Every year we have to go far or find a new spot for harvesting berries or medicine or go to a different community.”<sup>17</sup> Interaction with the environment provides community members

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<sup>15</sup> Ester Dysart, Personal Interview, May 31, 2012

<sup>16</sup> Leslie Dysart, Personal Interview, September 1, 2013

<sup>17</sup> Shirley Ducharme, Personal Interview and Evelyn Montgomery, Personal Interview, July 5,

with opportunities for a healthy lifestyle and the practice of *kistihdiminak*. As the lands and waters of northern Manitoba are affected, so are the Indigenous communities who have a close relationship with nature and other communities. Elder Vivian Moose said, “We have families living all over north. Who wants to see the same thing happening to family?”

Since the mega-projects started, Manitoba Hydro has hired a number of people as labour to work in the construction project and debris cleaning projects. These jobs are mostly temporary and contractual. Some community members find debris clean-up jobs as important opportunities, as it provides some temporary financial support and allows them to be on the land. However, some community Elders claim that many of the jobs with Manitoba Hydro are not culturally appropriate and are taking people away from land based activities. These Elders also believe that jobs, such as shoreline clean-up, do not provide youth and employees with an understanding of the entire system, only that which is related to their employment. Additionally, the Hydro jobs provide limited training and do not provide any scope for further skill development. Most of the OPCN community members working for the debris project in the summer are on social welfare during the winter.

Lack of physical activities and dependency towards the state regulated welfare system contributes to the social crisis of the reserve community, such as domestic violence, alcoholism and physical health disparities. In 2013 Manitoba Hydro abruptly stopped all subsidies to OPCN programs related to traditional food harvesting activities including subsidies for trapping and support to local fisheries. There was no consultation, negotiation or

public discussion. This decision resulted in the unemployment of 70 fishermen who had been fishing in Southern Indian Lake and the surrounding watershed for generations.<sup>18</sup>

Fishermen in the hydro affected communities in northern Manitoba report that the quality of fish is deteriorating because of mercury contamination, discoloration, infection through parasites and most importantly a decrease in the fish catch affected due to flooding and blocking of the waterways. Continuous and untimely fluctuation of water levels damages fish eggs and disrupts the regular spawning cycle. OPCN's economy has been most adversely affected as the fishery once caught 1 million pounds of fish in a season is now at the verge of closing the business due to scarcity of fish and lack of support.

### **Recommendations**

Considering the social, cultural and environmental damage done by Manitoba Hydro for the past several decades, major and immediate recommendations came from OPCN community members and are as follows:

Indigenous communities should be informed and motivated to invest in alternative energy sources, such as solar, wind, and geothermal energy. Sustainable energy development and community based interventions have been introduced in Manitoba through supportive organizations and are considered environment friendly. In 2015 Peguis First Nation and Fisher River First Nation signed a contract with Aki Energy, a Manitoba based non-government organization, to install geothermal systems in community houses.

Most of the Hydro flooded communities in northern Manitoba have a fishing based economy. As discussed above, constant changes to water levels damages the health of the fish

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<sup>18</sup> Calvin Baker, Personal Interview, September 1, 2013

population. Manitoba Hydro should consult the local fishermen's association before raising or lowering the water level so that the fish spawning is not disturbed.

Careful assessment of cumulative ecological effects of the construction of hydro dams in the northern boreal forest is essential. Studies by independent researchers should consider consultation with communities including a thorough and honest consultation with Elders and resource users to determine environmental and cultural impacts. Traditional and empirical knowledge of the flood affected community members should be given prime importance while assessing the impact.

Another form of mediation proposed to support Indigenous communities affected by generating stations is resource-revenue sharing. Resource-revenue sharing consists of directly supporting communities from the revenue produced through the sale of energy, particularly to southern Manitoba and the United States (Kulchyski, 2014). Manitoba Hydro could set aside a portion of revenue gained from energy sales or generating stations profits to be directly paid to communities in the vicinity of generating stations or to a larger organization of communities affected by the Churchill River Diversion and Lake Winnipeg Regulation projects.

## **Conclusions**

As Manitoba Hydro continues to move forward with plans for more generating stations, some OPCN Elders argue that they fail to consider and address the negative implications these projects have on the hydrology of the entire Nelson and Churchill River systems. This decision to focus strictly on the implications of these generating stations in the immediate area of dams provides a minimal understanding of the grave and long lasting effects of the projects.

Manitoba Hydro continues is directly undermining the claims of OPCN and other communities that are not in close proximity to a proposed generating station. Undermining these positions benefits Manitoba Hydro, as it also removes or postpones any claims of damage as a result of the Churchill River Diversion or the Augmented Flow Program. These claims are more prominent with the possibility of planned and proposed projects, as approximately 40% of the water used by Manitoba Hydro to power its battery of generating stations comes from Southern Indian Lake (Kamal et al., 2015). With more generating stations comes a greater need for water from reservoirs created by Manitoba Hydro, having a direct and highly negative impact on Southern Indian Lake, Lake Winnipeg, and the many other reservoirs created by the Crown Corporation.

Additionally, the continuation of this approach allows Manitoba Hydro a reduced number of consultation meetings, as they will not need to gain consent from communities like OPCN. Future projects, as with past projects, will continue the trend of under-consultation and lack of consent as they are planned and implemented. *Keeyask* helps to sideline these claims through its continued support of the status quo, dividing communities based on perceived impacts and failing to consider both community cohesion and the entirety of the hydrological system.

Hydropower produced at generating stations, especially in northern Manitoba, is far from 'green.' Although this form of energy may be technically renewable, there is no part of this exploitation that is 'green,' clean, or environmentally conscious. If Manitoba Hydro is to truly promote environmentally responsible energy, with socially aware practices, it must address the entirety of the hydrological system and begin the process of rejuvenating relationships with the land, water, and Indigenous communities throughout northern Manitoba. As Manitoba Hydro moves forward, it must learn the language of the river and learn to practice *kistihdiminak*.

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## 5. Responsibility



**Figure 5-1: Elder Helen Moose teaching fish fixing**

*We have a life that calls for responsibility. Responsibility towards our community and young generation, responsibility towards our Elders and our environment—that is who we are and no one can take that from us.*

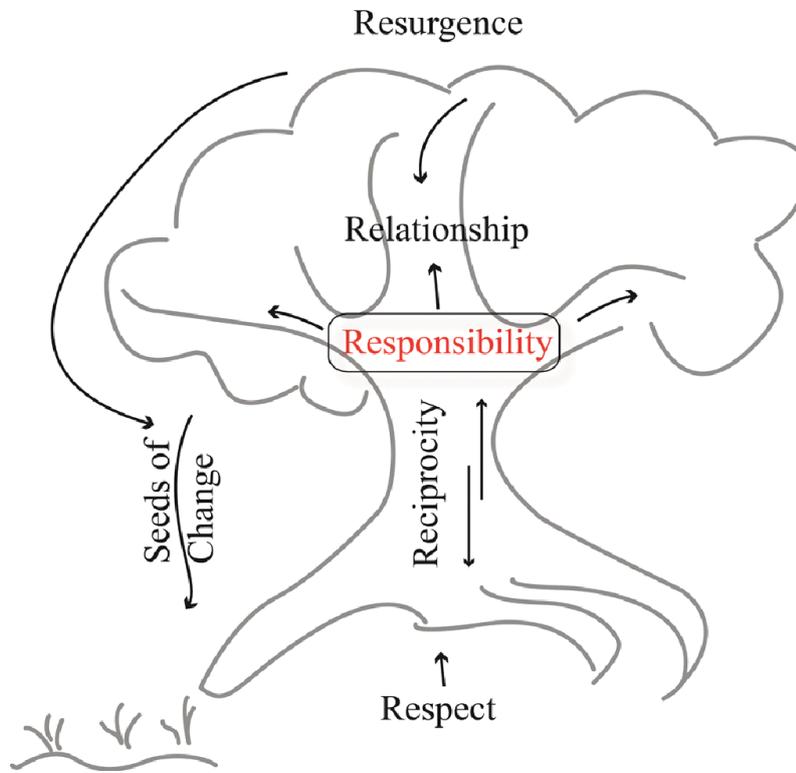
S. Ducharme, personal communication, August 15, 2013.

## **Medicine from the Birch Tree**

Story teller: Elder Vivian Moose

*Wisahkicahk went out for travelling. He ate a lot of food and was feeling full. He went to the birch trees and asked them to squeeze him tight. After a while he was feeling light. He asked the birch trees to let him go but they would not. He became angry and started striking the birch trees with a willow branch. The trees cracked and knotted. Saps started to come out to heal the bark of the trees. That's how birch tree become knotted and the saps were known as medicine.*

V. Moose, personal communication, June 17, 2014



**Figure 5-2: Tree of Knowledge (Responsibility)**

### **Chapter Summary**

Throughout my experience of working with *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN), I learnt that responsibility is perceived more as a celebration of life than a burden that needs to be carried to move forward. The meaning of the term ranges from communal activities to sharing love, care, food, space, friendship, labour, land, water, harvesting equipment, expectations, good wish, and prayers - anything one can possibly share. The act of responsibility is the relational accountability that Indigenous people rely on; however, it is not constrained as a social and community regulation, but rather is seen as a spontaneous

initiative, the absence of which creates a gap in the cycle of life. In order to continue this act of responsibility, OPCN members want to pass their traditional knowledge to the younger generations.

During my stay in OPCN I heard the use of the word *Wichihituwin* which means a thing that can help another person. This thing refers to all material (book, food, library, house, tools, money) and non-material (social support, love, care, human labour) elements that can support another person. Barb Spence introduced me to this term during my first interview with her. Community Elders teaches the youth the concept and practice of *Wichihituwin*. As Elder Vivian Moose said, “First learn to respect the community and learn to care about your land and then you can understand the meaning of *Wichihituwin*” (V. Moose, personal Communication, August 6, 2012).

This chapter describes how they continue this practice and how they have used this research project as a vehicle to strengthen their cultural practice. This chapter is particularly important since it provides a clear vision on Indigenous perspectives and praxis of food sovereignty. Last but not least, this chapter provides a clear guideline on how and where non-Indigenous projects and people can fit while working with Indigenous people.

In the tree of knowledge, responsibility grows as an outcome of reciprocity. It is a principal factor that shapes collectivity in a community—how far the tree will grow with how many branches and fruits and seeds are decided by how well the act of responsibility is executed.

## **Author's Acknowledgement**

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## 5.1 *Recipe for Change: Reclamation of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation*<sup>19</sup>

### **Introduction**

Hydroelectric projects in northern Manitoba, Canada, have undermined the environmental, economic and social welfare of Indigenous communities for decades (Waldram, 1988; Martin & Hoffman 2008; Liénafa & Martin, 2010; Kamal et al., 2014). In 1976, one such project, Manitoba Hydro's Churchill River Diversion (CRD), flooded many northern Manitoba Indigenous<sup>20</sup> communities (Waldram, 1988). CRD damaged Indigenous food and medicine, leading to food insecurity, negative health impacts and a legacy of poverty among the affected populations (Kamal et al., 2014).

The community of *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN), a First Nation reserve located on the shore of Southern Indian Lake (SIL), was one of the most negatively impacted of all the communities affected (Waldram, 1988). Despite OPCN's appeal for cultural and livelihood rights, community concern was purposely undermined by Manitoba Hydro and the province (Waldram, 1984, p. 236). A number of studies were published attesting to the severity of socioeconomic and environmental damages occurring in northern Manitoba,

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<sup>19</sup> Kamal, A. G., Linklater, R., Thompson, S., Dipple, J. and Ithinto Mechisowin Committee. (2015) *Recipe for Change: Reclamation of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation for Decolonization, Resource Sharing and Cultural Restoration*. *Globalization* 12(4), 1-17.

<sup>20</sup> Under the Canadian constitution, 1982, Section 35, Aboriginal refers to First Nation (recognized by the constitution), Métis (cultural and ethnic identity of individuals who are the result of relationships between Indigenous and Europeans) and Inuit (Indigenous people from northern Canada considered "Indian" in the Canadian constitution) people (Asch, 1984). OPCN is composed of both First Nations and Métis individuals who speak both Cree and English. This paper uses the term Indigenous to situate the community in the dialogue of Indigenous food sovereignty.

particularly in OPCN (Waldram, 1984, 1985, 1988; Hoffman, 2008; Loney, 1995; Hoffman & Martin, 2012). In 2009, a household food security survey confirmed that an alarming 75% of residents in 14 different northern Manitoba communities were food insecure (Thompson et al. 2011, p. 14). Of them, OPCN had the highest rate of food insecurity - 100% (ibid, p. 24).

However, within the existing socioeconomic challenges, communities in northern Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada, including OPCN, have worked persistently to preserve local food systems and cultural rights (Thompson et al., 2012; Kamal et al. 2014). The recent wave of food sovereignty discourse in North America acknowledges the need to address Indigenous organizing against the tactics of contemporary colonization (Morrison, 2011; Cornassel, 2012a; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Grey & Patel, 2014; Kamal et al., 2014). Few academic studies, however, have examined what Indigenous food sovereignty looks like as it is developed in practice.

Throughout this paper, we will argue that in Canada the practice of Indigenous food sovereignty through local food harvesting programs can provide an opportunity for decolonization. First, in order to gain a nuanced understanding of the current situation at OPCN, we must address the community's history and the establishment of hydropower production in northern Manitoba. Following this review, we will address the concepts of food security, food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty. Finally, we describe the history of the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program, hereafter IMP, and its contribution to decolonization within the community. As a means of establishing our argument from the local point of view, we will introduce OPCN's contextually specific concepts of resource sharing and decolonization.

## Community History

It is believed that Indigenous people started living in the Southern Indian Lake region 6000 years ago (Waldram 1988, p.116). Much later, in the early nineteenth century, a community was formed and named after the lake (ibid, p.117). People used to live well, with a thriving food system based on harvesting different seasonal foods and medicines from the land until “colonization intervened in the form of trade and treaties” (Elder Thomas Spence, pers. comm., September 22, 2013). In Canada, such treaties were made between the reigning monarch and Indigenous communities, most of which were signed between 1871 and 1921 (Waldram, 1988, p. 27). The initial conditions of agreement promised to guarantee mutual peace and friendship; Indigenous rights to trade, fish, and hunt on allocated reserve land; and to receive annual supplies of food, provisions and ammunition from the Crown “as long as the sun shines above and the waters flow in the ocean” (Morris, 1880, p. 96). However, in reality, the treaties were constructed under Canadian imperialist politics.

At the time of the treaty process in Manitoba, the community of SIL was meant to receive reserve land, named *Ithinoway Sagahegan* (People’s Lake), and benefits (Steve Ducharme, pers. comm, August 8, 2013). However, this plan never materialized and, in 1908, SIL residents were registered as members of the nearby community of Nelson House Cree Nation, now *Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation* (NCN), under Treaty 5 (Waldram 1988, p. 116).

In 1942, a commercial fishery was established to take advantage of the quality and availability of whitefish in SIL (ibid, 117). The lake became North America’s second largest whitefish fishery, producing approximately one million pounds of Grade A whitefish annually (Ducharme 2013). Under contemporary measures of poverty in Canada, only 27.9% of the population at SIL would have been considered poor at the time (Hoffman, 2008, p. 113).

Beginning in the 1960s, Manitoba entered a phase of hydropower production directed towards the construction of megaprojects along the Nelson River system (Waldram, 1988; Hoffman, 2008; Liénafa & Martin, 2010; Hoffman & Martin, 2012). The objective was to ‘modernize’ northern Indigenous communities with a “hydro induced” program of “modernization” and “re-development” (Robson, 1993, p. 106). Under Premier Duff Roblin, the province proposed a project, known as the Churchill River Diversion (CRD) that would divert the waters of the Churchill River through SIL, the Rat and Burntwood Rivers and into the Nelson River system (Waldram 1988, p. 119). Overall, this project would raise SIL by approximately 10 metres, effectively flooding the entirety of the community (ibid). Upon receipt of this information, the community began a vigorous battle against the province, ultimately leading to a change of government and promises to cancel the project (McClullum & McClullum, 1975, p. 107). Ultimately, the project moved forward. The new, low-level diversion ‘only’ project increased the level of SIL by 3 metres, forcing half of the community to relocate (McClullum & McClullum, 1975, p. 107-108). Eventually, the entirety of the community was forced to move in order to access infrastructure, including the school and nursing station (Hilda Dysart, pers. Comm. 2012). Construction of Missi Falls, the CRD control structure at the outlet of SIL into the Churchill River, effectively converted the lake into a reservoir that stores approximately 40% of the water used to power Manitoba Hydro’s arsenal of generating stations (Dysart, 2014, 1).

In response to the environmental destruction wrought by the construction of the CRD, five First Nations communities in northern Manitoba formed an alliance known as the Northern Flood Committee (NFC) (Waldram, 1988, p. 147). Although the NFC did not include the community at SIL, it did include the communities from Split Lake, Nelson House, Cross Lake, Norway House, and York Factory First Nations (ibid). These communities challenged Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro and ultimately brought about the Northern Flood

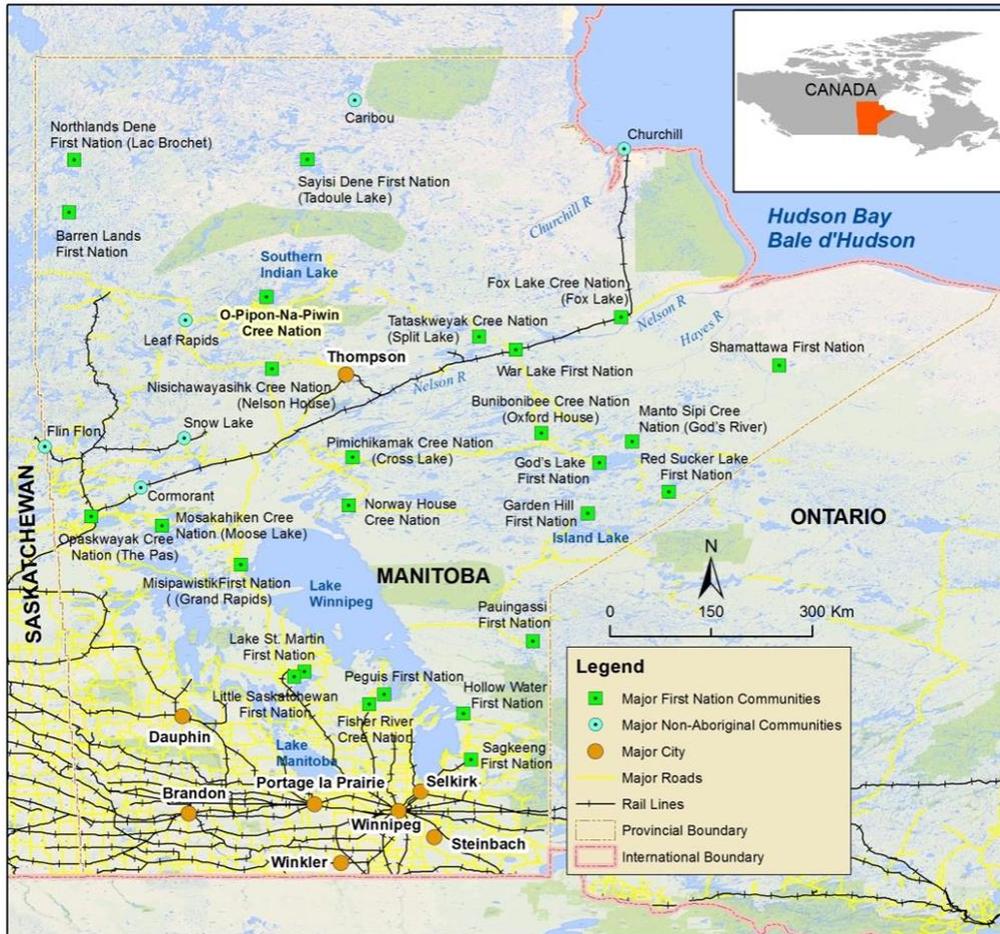
Agreement in 1977 (NFA) (ibid, p. 160). This agreement, termed a modern day treaty by Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Eric Robinson in 2000, established promises to the communities as a means of mitigation against the effects of hydropower production (Province of Manitoba, 2015; Kulchyski, 2008, p.134). Most prominently, Schedule E of the NFA establishes the “Substantive Purpose of Development Plan” and states it will affect “the eradication of mass poverty and mass unemployment and the improvement of the physical, social and economic conditions and transportation” (NFA, 1975). Strikingly, the SIL community was one of the most impacted by the CRD, but did not receive any compensation until much later, because they were not recognized as a reserve by the federal government and did not have title to the land (Hoffman & Martin, 2012, p. 37). A mitigation plan was needed to minimize social and environmental damages but was never truly established (Dysart, 2014).

The timing of the formation of the contemporary OPCN reserve was influenced largely by hydroelectric construction (Hoffman & Martin, 2012). At that time, another hydroelectric generating station, called *Wuskwatim*, was proposed by Manitoba Hydro, in financial partnership with NCN to be built on the Burntwood River system, which would further impact SIL (Kulchyski 2008, Hoffman & Martin, 2012, p. 45). In order to establish the partnership and complete the project, Manitoba Hydro’s proposal required community support (Leslie Dysart, pers. Comm. August 8, 2013). Rather than risk a defeat of the proposed *Wuskwatim* partnership at the hands of NCN band members living at SIL, who were predominantly against further construction, the rules were changed drastically by the federal government in regard to the creation of a new reserve at SIL, called *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (Kulchyski, 2008, p.143). The reserve was established in 2005, less than a year prior to the vote on the *Wuskwatim* Generating Station. The divide and conquer strategy of government effectively changed the outcome of the NCN referendum on *Wuskwatim* (ibid),

as creation of the OPCN reserve eliminated 400 highly probable no votes from the NCN band (Dysart, 2014, p. 4). Construction on the dam began in 2006 and went into operation in 2012, resulting in further fluctuation of water levels around the community and impacts to OPCN. These impacts are ongoing.

### **Impact of Churchill River Diversion on *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation**

The cultural, social and physical well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada are deeply integrated with their food system, a food system that culturally incorporates harvesting and sharing food with sustainable care for the land (Morrison, 2011; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). OPCN members lost regular access to both culturally appropriate food and their livelihoods following completion of the CRD. Before the lake was flooded, people enjoyed diverse wild food harvested in different seasons (Hoffman & Martin, 2012). After the CRD flooding, wild food harvesting activities were compromised in all seasons. Continuous fluctuation of water levels created massive debris in the waterways, breaking the seasonal fish spawning cycle, and causing wild game migration inland (Kamal et al., 2014).



**Figure 5-3: Study location, *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation**

Source: Kamal et al. 2014

Indigenous people around the world value food as a source of medicine for numerous health benefits (Kuhnlein et al., 2013). In Canada, land-based food is considered essential for “identity, health and survival” (Power, 2008, p.95). Following completion of the CRD, a lack of wild food has impacted all aspects of OPCN’s community health. Wild food is important for physical nourishment, as it is rich in nutrients (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Mason, Anderson & Dana, 2009, p.347). It also inspires physical activities and a healthy outdoor lifestyle (Kamal & Thompson, 2013, p. 6). Wild meat and fish can be both a source of protein and minerals and contain less fat and cholesterol than commercial meats (Waldram, 1985, p. 45). Environmental damage from the CRD caused mercury contamination in fish in OPCN

and other flooded communities (Loney, 1995, p. 238). It also drowned the habitat for important medicinal plants. In addition, gradual dependency on poor quality store bought food and a lack of physical activity caused acute health disparities and chronic diseases such as diabetes in all CRD affected communities (Public Utility Board 2014, 7).

Arguably, the most direct impact of CRD on OPCN's community was the near complete destruction of the fishery - to approximately 10% of its original capacity (Ducharme 2013). As an outcome of this destruction, unemployment rates increased throughout the community (Waldram, 1985, 1988; Hoffman, 2008). Under these circumstances, people were forced to travel long distances by boat or floatplane to harvest wild food and medicine. A decade after CRD, Manitoba Hydro gave a partial subsidy for harvesting activities, which they abruptly ended in 2013 without consultation or explanation (Dysart, 2014, p.2). In addition, the high cost of living, particularly the cost of food and gas in the north, has contributed to continuing impoverishment. The community was forced to rely upon government social assistance programs (Hoffman, 2008, p. 114-115).

Both food security and sovereignty over Indigenous food systems were severely impacted by the CRD. The following section presents an analysis of food security, food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty in Canada. This will follow a discussion to reflect on the differences between colonial and Indigenous food systems.

### **Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Indigenous Food Sovereignty**

The concept of food security emerged in the 1970s and is defined as “exist[ing] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 1996). Household food security is taken as a technical measure to assess the severity of hunger, poverty and malnutrition in marginalized communities (Chandrasekera, 2008;

Coleman-Jensen et al, 2011; Tarasuk, 2009; Thompson et al. 2011; Council of Canadian Academics, 2014). While the concept of food security has little to say about the means through which food is secured, it is often a part of a neoliberal framework that views food as a commodity most effectively delivered through the global market (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013, p.1080).

Although food security and food sovereignty cover some common ground, they are often considered to be very different concepts (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Jarosz, 2014; Menser, 2014). The Via Campesina 1996 Declaration of Food Sovereignty defined food sovereignty as “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security” (Via Campesina, 1996, p.1). Put forward as a multidimensional rights-based political framework, food sovereignty situates contemporary resource depletion, economic crisis and environmental degradation within the context of neoliberal trade and production, with negative consequences for people’s access to healthy, sustainable and culturally appropriate food. Besides a focus on the fundamental causes of hunger, other noteworthy and interlinked issues addressed in the food sovereignty discourse include industrialization of agriculture, colonial strategies of (under)development, commodification of food, and protection of the rights of farmers, women and Indigenous peoples (Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007, Patel, 2009; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). As a growing social justice movement, food sovereignty offers alternative modes of producing and consuming food, suggesting participatory methods of intervention (Stédile & de Carvalho, 2011, p. 25). In short, the food sovereignty movement functions as a broad political alliance to rectify the problems wrought by the current food system at the local, regional, national and global levels.

Food sovereignty distinguishes the concept of “sovereignty” from its more rigid classical definitions (Menser, 2014). Traditionally, sovereignty has been understood as “final and absolute authority in a political community” (Hinsley, 1966, p. 1) and is a concept related to a state’s legal control over a particular geographical area and its population. It is connected to the notion of private property and resource accumulation, where nature is divided and extracted based on material value and state politics (Dean & Levi, 2003; Menser, 2014). In contrast, food sovereignty refers to increased control over the food system by both consumers and producers, who are seen as having shared collective interests contrary to the capitalist emphasis upon accumulation and privatization (Wittman, 2011). With influences ranging from Marxism to ecology, food sovereignty values growing food as a means of maintaining sustainable ecosystems and promoting cultural integrity as opposed to a means of maximizing and accumulating capital, resources, and property (Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Andree et al., 2014; Menser, 2014).

Within this context, food sovereignty is a large and diverse movement encompassing a variety of perspectives, goals and approaches. Regarding the state, in some cases, the goal is achieving self-determination – and the freedom of a dignified life - without political intervention from state, while in other cases, states are called upon to fulfill certain rights while respecting the ability of communities to assert their rights in a meaningful way (Menser, 2014). In the postcolonial era, a state’s control over the marginalized is re-established through the imposition of universal human rights over Indigenous peoples (Levi & Dean, 2003, p.9; Kulchyski, 2013). The concept of universal human rights is not entirely negative. However, when it is used to undermine cultural distinctions and remove rights established to protect these distinctions, it becomes problematic (Levi & Dean, 2003, p.10; Alfred, 2009b; Kulchyski, 2013). As Corntassel argues, “Rights-based approaches do not offer meaningful restoration of Indigenous homelands and food sovereignty” (2012a, p. 93).

The United Nations approved the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 and Canada adopted it in 2010 (Lum, 2014). However, in practice Canadian state regulations follow the historical blindness that can come with United Nation's universal plea of human rights (Kulchyski, 2013; Lum, 2014). It creates further authority for the state to determine the benefits and limitations of an already colonized population.

In Indigenous understanding, sovereignty is inherent and collective (Barker 2005, p.20). It is infused with interconnected autonomy nurtured through relationship with land. A community, for Indigenous peoples, includes both human and non-human beings, particularly natural entities (Adelson, 2000, Simpson, 2000) and in a sovereign space, all aspects of culture (language, sacred ceremonies, food system, livelihoods, relationship, stories with land) are preserved, as they are essential for community health and sustainability; for example, Cree concept of health and collective well-being, "has everything to do with connections to the land and to a rich and complex past" (Adelson, 2000, p. 25). Thus sovereignty for Indigenous people, "cannot be separated from people or their culture" (Kickingbird, 1977, p. 2). That is why restoring the culture of a particular region is fundamental for Indigenous food sovereignty, generally more so than to non-Indigenous food sovereignty. Indigenous food sovereignty addresses "Indigenous" aspirations for collective well-being and prefers to rectify inequality and acknowledge people's rights to land and cultural integrity (Morrison, 2011).

Achieving food sovereignty for Indigenous people also requires the inclusion of Indigenous cultural values in state policies and Indigenous participation in the economy (Morrison, 2011; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). In Canada, the incorporation of Indigenous values is essential for the reclamation of Indigenous Treaty rights, as opposed to continued colonization under the guise of modernization, development and national prosperity (Kulchyski, 2013). To be more specific, the meaning of reclamation is not "collaboration,

partnership or infrastructural development” provided from the state, but the removal of discriminatory state regulations, land and title transfers and “the stopping of practices that encroach upon the sovereignty of those territories (from active resource extraction to more passive but deadly forms of pollutions like the dumping of radioactive toxins proximate to watersheds, the siting of incinerators, overdrawing water tables, or damming rives)” (Menser, 2014, p. 70). In light of this argument, food sovereignty for Indigenous people in Canada is contributing to past and ongoing commitment of Indigenous political mobilization in North America<sup>21</sup>.

Working to make sovereignty over cultural and livelihoods resources and relationships a reality is a major step towards regeneration of a long oppressed people in Canada (Cornassel, 2008, 2012a, 2012b). To achieve this reality, decolonization must start at a personal, intimate, and collective level and must be realized both in mind and action (Fanon, 1952; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005). Indigenous food sovereignty advocates for decolonizing activities - reclaiming land for hunting, fishing, trapping, berry picking, community gardens, wild food programs and other cultural activities, along with their cultural meanings. These activities involve restoration and development of cultural practices, values and thoughts that were overpowered but are still important and necessary for the continuance and renewal of ideas, well-being and empowerment of colonized people. According to OPCN leaders, these activities help to re-build sovereignty.

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<sup>21</sup> Indigenous resistance against colonial policies of the United States, Canada, and Central and South America to achieve sovereignty and cultural regeneration has been consistent. From the longest walk in early 70s to the most recent Idle No More movement there are many noteworthy examples of political mobilization (Johansen 2013; The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014).

Within this context, we introduce OPCN's concept of resource, best expressed through the word *wechihituwin*. *Wechihituwin* refers to any means of livelihoods that is shared and used to help another person, family or the community. The term emphasizes the fact that food in the cultural tradition of OPCN is not a commodity; it is a set of relationships. Similarly, the concept of decolonization is defined as *pasekonekewin* which means taking the person by the hand and helping her or him stand. From this section, *wechihituwin* is used in place of "resource" to provide a more nuanced and spiritual significance to land, water and food, as well as the life living within each. The term *pasekonekewin* is used to elaborate the integration of youth in food harvesting activities in OPCN. Using these concepts, we examine local food programs, understanding them not as isolated actions, but in the context of efforts to reestablish Indigenous sovereignty over resources, land and culture (Barker, 2005).

## **Research Background and Methodology**

Following CRD, OPCN's food champions and Elders worked towards the maintenance and revitalization of their cultural livelihood and connection to the land, through community gatherings and individual efforts to train youth (Kamal et al., 2014). Upon receiving results from the 2009 survey on food insecurity, OPCN felt a need for an immediate response within the community. This study highlighted NCN's community-based country food<sup>22</sup> program as a probable cause for their significantly lower food insecurity (Thompson et al., 2011). From this realization, OPCN envisioned a wild food program that could subsidize some of the prohibitively expensive costs of harvesting. In return for this subsidy, food champions would share some of the *wechihituwin* with the community through the wild food

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<sup>22</sup> Country food refers to locally harvested fish, mammals, plants, birds and berries; however as a result of community hesitancy towards this word, wild food will be used in its place throughout this article.

program. In response to community interest, in 2010, Ph.D. candidate Asfia Kamal, who conducted the 2009 survey at OPCN, focused her doctoral thesis on helping to establish a wild food program. The study was proposed as a collaborative initiative between the University of Manitoba and OPCN.

In order to complete this study, and help establish the wild food program, both parties agreed to use OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) principles as a foundation of the study. OCAP is a set of research guidelines adopted and proposed by the Steering Committee of the Aboriginal Regional Longitudinal Health Survey in Canada. The objectives of these guidelines are to add self-determination, collective ownership, and community control over research information to studies conducted with Aboriginal people or in Aboriginal territory (Schnarch, 2004). As the project progressed, members of a University of Manitoba research team, led by Kamal, participated in a multitude of community events and programs in relation to the establishment of the wild food program. She learned and gathered information through multiple visits to the community, helped to orchestrate youth educational experiences and was invited to a number of community gatherings. These opportunities provided her with a sense of community and relationship with the people of OPCN, a relationship that greatly informs her knowledge and research.

Relationships formed through the advancement of this program facilitated a total of 44 open-ended interviews, two participatory video workshops, and eight focus groups. These interviews allowed for what were probably the most informative and impactful interactions of the research - storytelling and personal narratives from harvesters and Elders. Stories and narratives have an important place in Indigenous cultures, and provide a wealth of knowledge about a number of different topics that are necessary to gain a nuanced understanding of the culture and life of a particular group of people (Iseke and Moore, 2011; Simpson, 2011; Fitznor, 2012). Additionally, these stories and narratives helped provide understanding of

community members' perception of Indigenous food sovereignty as well as the vision and establishment of the *Ithinto Mechisowin* ('food from the land') Program (IMP).

### ***Ithinto Mechisowin* ('food from the land') Program**

Hydroelectric power production in northern Manitoba removed the *wechihituwin* from the Cree people. As the community moves forward and attempts to assert its place as an Indigenous community, it must “regain its *wechihituwin* from the destructive power of energy production” (Barb Spence, pers. comm., Nov. 8, 2013). IMP, as a program, has brought this option back to the community by supporting individual and community claims to the land surrounding, and including, SIL.

Community members decided to establish this program to support others within the community who are unable to access healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food. From 2012 to 2013, the IMP evolved in three major phases. First, a committee was formed to discuss the needs of the program. OPCN's program is supported through sharing *wechihituwin*, in this case equipment, space, labour, skills from the community. In the second phase, the community focused on local outreach, applied for funding to hire a community coordinator, and renovated the community's food handling area, as per Health Canada regulations (Kamal et al., 2014, p.146). The program received funding from various local and provincial government organizations in January 2013. In the third phase, three industrial freezers were bought to store wild food and medicine. The program began distribution in June 2013. During the first four months of the program the number of families receiving food from the program grew from five to 390 families. Money is provided to subsidize some harvesting costs if the food champion agrees to share the food through IMP. Food collected through program activities is labeled, stored in freezers, and distributed once a week to single mothers, low-income families, and Elders (Kamal et al., 2014, p.147).

## ***Pasekonekewin: Empowering Youth in OPCN***

Youth programs are of paramount importance to the IMP, and as such have been established on multiple occasions throughout the year. These programs consist of hunting, fishing, berry picking, preparation of wild food, gardening, and education on the health benefits of different wild foods. OPCN's Oscar Blackburn School plays an integral part of the educational aspect of the program and has helped instill culturally important principles in the community's youth through a life skills class. This class requires youth participation in the IMP, creates outdoor activities for food harvesting and involves Elders who teach youth about "the Cree principles of responsibility, respect, focus, patience, sharing, listening and generosity," says class instructor Shirley Ducharme. Such activities contribute to community initiatives of *pasekonekewin* and youth empowerment. Applauding IMP's collaboration with the school, community members recommend the use of both educational methods as a means of continuing decolonization while remaining true to community heritage. "My son should learn to read and learn to hunt, we need both to fight and stay close to our roots" (Dysart pers. comm, 2013).

IMP also uses storytelling, in Cree, throughout program activities, to engage the community through culturally appropriate educational methods. "Each food harvested from the land has a story that teaches something to us," explained program advisor Steve Ducharme. Additionally, the program instills an understanding of the relationship and responsibilities community members have with the land and waters of their homeland. Indigenous people in Canada use storytelling and knowledge sharing as an essential part of education and empowerment for youth (Iseke & Moore, 2011, Simpson 2011). Storytelling has been a cultural framework for maintaining Cree collective memory in Canada for generations (McLeod, 2007). Scholars consider activities on the land with Elders and youth

together as decolonizing, essential for Indigenous knowledge transmission and community cohesion (Simpson, 2004, p. 374; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p.613).

OPCN's concept of decolonization, in particular, is inherently one of support and communal strength. Both Cree terms used in this paper; *wechihituwin* and *pasekonekewin*, have a common theme, communal support. Table 1 addresses this theme related to food.

**Table 5-1: The importance of seasonal local food harvesting and the impact of the Churchill River Diversion.**

<b>Season</b>	<b>Seasonal traditional food and method of consumption</b>	<b>Health significance as understood by OPCN members</b>	<b>Cultural significance of harvesting and consuming the food</b>	<b>Stories of traditional food-related activities</b>
SUMMER AND WINTER	Fish (smoked, boiled and fried, dry fish with berries, fish head boiled, fish broth for soup)	White fish is good for diabetes and blood pressure. Jack fish guts are cold medicine. Fish head and broth are good sources of calcium (Jennifer Linklater).	Act of fishing teaches us that we need to work hard. (Fisherman Wilbur Wood)	'In summer spending time in the fish camp was like a ritual in the community. Youth loved playing by the beach and chasing fish.' (Louis Dumas)
SPRING	Beaver and muskrat (smoked and boiled meat)	Beaver meat has pain relieving and anti-inflammatory element. Muskrat meat is quality protein (Roger Moose).	Trapping teaches focus, hard work, and respect for Elders. Beavers are hard working and youth must be too. (Elder Ross Moose)	'Trapping beaver and muskrat was a favorite past-time for us before the CRD. We used to catch hundreds of muskrats, now we can only catch a few if we are lucky'. (Steve Durcharme)
SPRING	Ducks, geese, and other waterfowl (boiled meat and broth for soup with oats)	Duck and goose meat is good for heart health and high blood pressure (Roger Moose).	Hunting ducks and geese can teach about determination, focus and is a form of meditation. (Barb Spence)	'We always like to save some of our birds for feasts and gatherings. Goose broth with oatmeal is a favourite dish in every gathering.' (Delia Dysart)
SUMMER	Seagull eggs (boiled)	Good sources of protein and is good for bones (Barb Spence).	Harvesting seagull eggs teaches the rules of conservation. (Elder Vivian Moose)	'In summer, before CRD, fishermen used to bring baskets full of seagull eggs. It was a treat for us'. (Barb Spence)

Season	Seasonal traditional food and method of consumption	Health significance as understood by OPCN members	Cultural significance of harvesting and consuming the food	Stories of traditional food-related activities
SUMMER	Berries (Blueberry, moss berry, raspberry, and cranberry)  (mixed with dry meat and fish, raw and making jam with sugar)	Medicines for colds, diarrhea and other stomach problems, diabetes and detoxifying body (Elder Florence Donkey).	Berry harvesting teaches sharing and caring for family. (Linda Baker)	'Women used to go out for berry picking with their families and children, make tea and socialize all day long sharing their harvest'. (Hilda Dysart)
SUMMER	Tea (Labrador, wild mint)	Medicine for cold and headache (Elder Vivian Moose).	Spending time with medicinal plant is healing, and teaches generosity, peace, kindness and respect for the land (Roger Moose).	After you use a medicinal plant, you need to throw it on fire or somewhere safe where people will not walk on it. You also need to leave something behind when you pick them. I still do that. I leave tobacco when I pick wild mint.' (Shirley Ducharme)
FALL	Moose (meat, lard from bone marrow, nose) (Boiled, smoked, dry)	Dry moose meat with berries is good for stomach and bones (Elder Helen Moose).	Hunting moose teaches responsibility for feeding family and allows for sharing (Shirley Ducharme)	'The common saying is one should not eat his first kill. This is to teach the young hunter about kindness and sharing.'(Shirley Ducharme)

## **Reestablishing *Wechihituwin***

*Ithinto Mechisowin* Program (IMP) is an outcome of OPCN's growing spirit to reproduce and reuse *wechihituwin* within the community. The table above gives a contextual account of OPCN's existing practices that address life on the land. These practices are primary determinants of food sovereignty and community well-being. Being on the land and participating in bush related activities resonates with Cree people's distinct culture, concepts of health and well-being and ratifies history of "the connections between identity and personal, social and political well-being" (Adelson, 2000, p. 99). The stories told youth connect past with present and contribute to a future where food is a source of cultural strength. In this future, food, as *wechihituwin*, represents more than sustenance, it contains stories and memories that can heal the community. Similarly, a food program building is not just infrastructure, it is a catalyst to regenerate *wechihituwin*, to inspire new ideas and collective will. The program's success has motivated other local organizations in OPCN to implement different youth focused programs. The program office itself is slowly becoming a place of community gathering, reinventing social bonds and collective wellbeing.

## **Conclusion**

The OPCN wild food program is decolonizing, providing both practical control over resources and cultural restoration. Indigenous food sovereignty, which emphasizes the importance of cultural practices, is a pathway in this case towards decolonizing land and peoples. Through the IMP case study, we provide evidence that community-defined programs similar to this can be beneficial in a number and variety of social and cultural domains. Additionally, Indigenous regional programs and organizations can work as a political actor to turn (sovereignty) theory into practice. For example, the Inuit Circumpolar Council has been helping to mobilize Inuit sovereignty in the Arctic (Shadian, 2014).

In the way in which OPCN's food champions use the term food sovereignty, neither 'food' nor 'sovereignty' retains their classical meanings. OPCN contested the predominant understanding of 'food' – understood as 'consumable commodities' – and struggled to restore its cultural meaning as the bond between people, health and land. IMP is OPCN's active vision to go beyond this struggle, becoming more food sovereign through the process of Elders and food champions sharing stories and teachings with youth, and through the process of sharing wild foods with those in need. The intention is to “step out of the box” and make these stories and teachings as lived experience to “remove our colonial blinders” (Simpson, 2011, p. 148).

Sovereignty is redefined by OPCN as a re-establishment of relationships with the land and *wechihituwin* of their area. OPCN does not perceive sovereignty as control over land, water or wildlife, but a relationship with these entities that allows for the mutual benefit of all parties. The community does not perceive sovereignty as an ability to take from others or the environment, but to support the community through engagement and sharing of *wechihituwin*.

IMP has been successful as an outcome of the existing *wechihituwin*, as opposed to establishing a program on the basis of importing a pre-defined framework. However, it has faced challenges since its inception. Ensuring a food handling area as per Health Canada regulation was the primary challenge. Health Canada regulations are meant for good health, hygiene and food safety. However, in remote Indigenous communities, receiving external support to make any kind of change is time consuming and costly. Additionally, financing such programs can be immensely difficult, and at times when a budget is not available, community cohesion and support is necessary to provide the required equipment. Lack of infrastructure can also hamper attempts at supporting wild food programs.

Furthermore, establishing this case study as a permanent framework from which all communities are able to establish Indigenous food sovereignty can be problematic. Challenges within each and every community vary in type and severity, making a predefined framework difficult to implement. The impacts of colonization are so grave and continuous that long-term healing is required.

The IMP shows that youth empowerment, through the practice of *pasekonekewin*, is one means of supporting the long-term healing of the community, which can be a combination of both Indigenous and western education which is a welcome approach present in Canadian Indigenous communities (Ball 2004, 459-460). Additionally, transmission of knowledge through Elders and youth engagement in land-based activities is highly encouraged as a step towards Indigenous cultural regeneration (Alfred, 2009b, as cited in Corntassel, 2012a, p.97). The IMP is a testament to Indigenous strength against colonial forces. Actions such as these call for a reinforcement of contemporary research with Indigenous wisdom and community driven projects. Related to policy, governments and corporations, for example Manitoba Hydro, should accommodate Indigenous sovereignty cultural restoration in its policy and activities and consider issues surrounding natural resource extraction and exploitation, land based industries and food production.

Outside researchers can provide a number of benefits to community programs, through grant writing and establishment of external relationships and partnerships. However, these programs must be community based and centered on the wants and needs of the community within which it will be situated. Any community hoping to establish Indigenous food sovereignty must find an approach that is right in their particular situation, though this case study can be used to help guide initial planning and decision-making. Communities must find their own spirit “to cause a mental awakening” (Alfred, 2009a, p.282). To quote Alfred and Corntassel (2005):

“[we need] to start to use our Indigenous languages to frame our thoughts, the ethical framework of our philosophies to make decisions and to use our laws and institutions to govern ourselves”. (p.614)

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## 6. Relationship



**Figure 6-1: Elder Florence Donkey in the Muskrat camp**

*We respect each other, that is what we mean by relationship, that's how we sustain.*

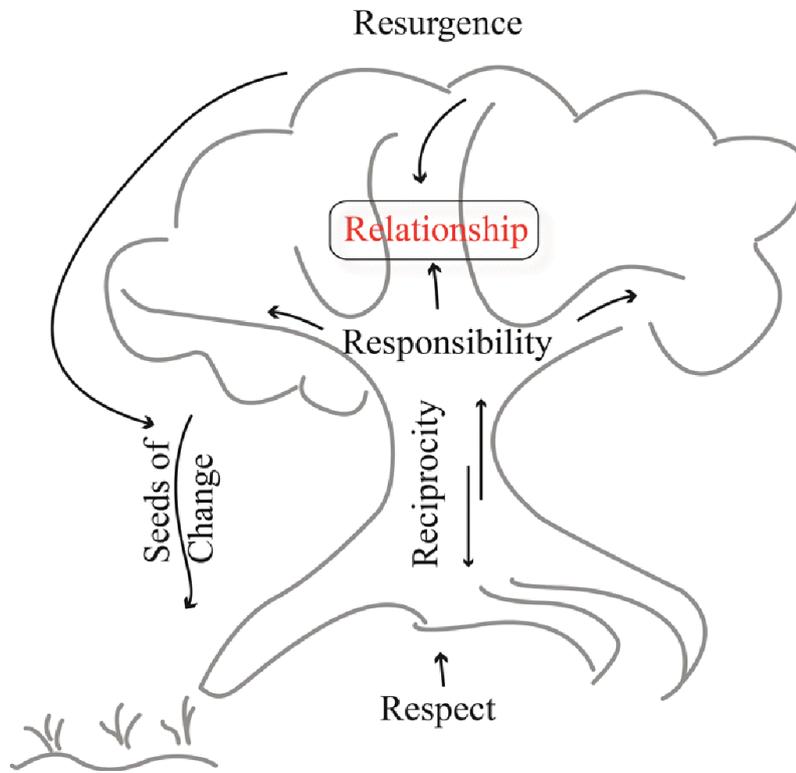
Elder Florence Donkey, personal communication, May 29, 2014

## **Learning from a Moose**

Story teller: Elder Robert Dysart and Elder William Spence.

*It was during winter. Wisahkicahk wanted to travel safe. So, he made friends with moose. He turned himself into a moose and said, younger brother, can I travel with you? The moose said, yes. While they were travelling together, Wisahkicahk heard a branch cracking, he got scared and ran away. The moose did not and said, it was no hunter. The moose said, if I hear the hunter coming, I will run away. So follow me, my brother. Wisahkicahk followed the moose and safely finished his journey in the woods.*

Elder R. Dysart and W. Spence, personal communication, August 6, 2013



**Figure 6-2: Tree of Knowledge (Relationship)**

### Chapter Summary

The value of relationship for Indigenous people is sacred, spiritual and holistic and interconnected. It is not solely physical and hence it is important to understand western concepts such as capital, money, resource, and asset cannot be meaningfully associated while discussing Indigenous concerns whether it is related to food or any other aspects of livelihoods.

At the personal level, the two segments of this chapter describe my growth and understanding of Indigenous relationships—communal and interpersonal - and how the non-

monetary values overtake the monetary understandings in life. In order to explain that by using the OPCN case study, I have provided two different analyses of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF)—the former and earlier written approach uses SLF as an analytical tool to explain Indigenous livelihoods and the latter approach critically evaluates the limitations of classical SLF and how that concept can be enriched by the use of different and culturally appropriate principles of livelihood relationships.

In the last chapters I have introduced different principles that motivate relationships in the OPCN community, such as *Wichihituwin*, *okanatawewoh*, *pasekonekewin*. In this chapter, these principles will be discussed in relation to OPCN's understanding of resources. I have tried to answer questions such as, what OPCN's relationship with livelihood resources is and how the practice of these relationships makes their livelihood understanding different from that of western understanding?

Throughout the thesis, I have tried to reiterate that an understanding of Indigenous relationship that is encoded in cultural and nonmonetary relationship is vital. This chapter reflects on this argument unequivocally. Relationship creates the branches of the tree of knowledge and motivates intergenerational bonds and growth on different levels, groups of people, and individuals living in the community. A western view of the world does not allow us to see this non-capitalist mode of relationship.

### **Author's Acknowledgement**

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## **6.1 *Achieving Sustainable Livelihoods***<sup>23</sup>

In the era of “contemporary colonialism” (Corntassel, 2012), food sovereignty for Aboriginal peoples is a necessary struggle for cultural survival. In Canada, colonial and neoliberal policies have been detrimental to First Nation people’s livelihoods, as their traditional lands were taken over by settlers in the name of development (Ballard, 2012). These policies deprive and isolate them from land, culture, community, traditional food and medicinal resources (Anderson & Bone, 2009; Nue & Therrien, 2003). Access to natural resources and other assets are required for achieving food and livelihoods security but First Nation peoples are still being deprived access.

While Canadian policies are undermining First Nation access to natural resources, ongoing local community economic development to revive cultural knowledge and food access is increasing possibilities of restoring their livelihood assets (Thompson et al., 2011). In this article, we explore the role of the community-based country foods program in providing increased access to livelihood assets. We trace how past and contemporary colonial assimilation policies have damaged traditional livelihood security and created multiple and multi-generational socio-economic consequences. The sustainable livelihoods approach is applied to rural development worldwide yielding great insights. However, this approach has seldom been applied to consider food sovereignty in the context of Indigenous communities in Canada. A sustainable livelihood and food sovereignty analysis is undertaken for a country

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<sup>23</sup> Achieving sustainable well-being through indigenous food sovereignty in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation in F. Deer, T. Falkenberg, B. Mcmillan, & L. Sims (Eds). *Sustainable Well-Being Concepts, Issues, and Educational Practice* (pp. 1-21). Winnipeg, MB: ESWB Press.

food program at *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN). OPCN is a remote northern Manitoba First Nation.

## **Food Sovereignty**

The Declaration of Nyéléni defines food sovereignty as: “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty, 2007, p. 1). Food sovereignty connects people to land and challenges colonialism creating potential to provide Indigenous peoples more cultural, social and political freedoms. A food sovereignty analysis looks at the agency and structure of local people in ownership over the food system in addition to considering whether they have sufficient access to local and culturally appropriate food (Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2011, p. 87).

The Indigenous and peasant organizations initiating the food sovereignty movement prioritized protection of their territory and the need for land redistribution (Altieri, 2008; Holt-Giménez, Patel, & Shattuck, 2009). The movement considers land as a place where ecological and social reproduction takes place (Menser, 2014; Pimbert, 2009). Discussing food sovereignty, Pimbert (2009) says,

Comprehensive agrarian reforms need to consider ‘territory’ as a more inclusive and important concept than mere ‘land’ and, with this, the right to self-determination of Indigenous peoples in their territories. (p. 14)

The Indigenous food sovereignty concept resonates with the “self-determination of Indigenous peoples in their territories.” Actions and slogans of the British Columbia food

system network and the Idle No More movement show the need and hope for Indigenous sovereignty.

### **Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Sustainable Well-Being**

Indigenous food sovereignty is integral to the Indigenous food system, health and well-being (Corntassel, 2012; Indigenous Food System Network, 2014). While food sovereignty is peoples' control over their food system (Wittman et al. 2011), Indigenous food sovereignty depends on successful knowledge sharing about sustainable food systems (Turner, Ignace & Ignace, 2000). The Indigenous Food System Network (2014) identifies four distinct characteristics of Indigenous food sovereignty, namely that: a) food is sacred, spiritual and a gift from the creator; b) food harvest is collective and participatory; c) consumption of locally harvested and produced traditional food brings ownership and self-determination; and d) it is valuable against colonial law and policies.

Indigenous food sovereignty is also based on the Indigenous worldview that perceives land as living (Morrison, 2011). The Indigenous worldview acknowledges land as a sacred, resourceful and shared space where people feed each other and pass on knowledge for a better future (Alfred, 2009). Land is more than a space to harvest and produce food for Indigenous people—it is identity and something sacred. Land is shaped from freedom of democratic entitlement for a dignified life on earth. Land is not to be “stripped, taken apart or desecrated, nor should boundaries of property (ownership) be placed up on her” (Verney, 2004, p. 134). Rather than owning land, many Indigenous peoples' relationship to land is based on active stewardship and reciprocity (Corntassel, 2012).

In Canada, Indigenous peoples' livelihoods are built around their ability to manage, practice and access land and land-based/country food resources. The process of their sustainable well-being is integrated into this food system (Corntassel, 2008). According to

Corntassel (2008), everyday practice of knowledge transmission is key to cultural continuity, which keeps the food system connected with individuals, households and communities. In other words, traditional livelihoods of Indigenous people are sustainable when they are connected to land economically, culturally and environmentally. As Corntassel (2008) explains, sustainability is connected to “the transmission of traditional knowledge and cultural practices to future generations” and for maintaining traditional language, culture, family and livelihood, the constant connection to “natural world (i.e., gathering medicines, hunting and fishing, basket making, etc.)” is essential (p. 118). Indigenous scholars argue that it is the interconnectedness and inherent practice of maintaining sustainable food systems that made Indigenous people challenge the inequities of colonial policies (Corntassel, 2012; McDonald, 2000).

### **Colonization and Food Insecurity**

Indigenous peoples in Canada were deprived of their rights to access culturally appropriate food by colonial policies. Their traditional culture and customs were undermined by the colonial government (Anderson & Bone, 2009; Nue & Therrien, 2003). With centuries of colonial oppression, the social, economic, educational and most importantly, health conditions of the Indigenous population have become dire. This was not their situation pre-colonization (Hungry Wolf, 1996). First Nations were able to lead a healthy and hearty life based on their sustainable subsistence economy, traditional knowledge and culture. Indigenous had access to natural resources. The land and water resources were renewable that fostered this economy applying the common property concept (Nadasdy, 2008).

Economic and ecological damage to Indigenous communities are a result of institutional rules enacted through the Indian Act for the Canadian First Nation population and the “maldevelopment” (Shiva, 1989) that resulted in many industrial projects, including

hydro development, on First Nation lands and resource areas (Mascarenhas, 2012). This process created a cycle of poverty and health problems in northern Manitoba First Nation reserves and non-reserve communities. The rise of colonial enterprise gradually expanding the capitalist mode of production by controlling the fur trade followed by taking over land by treaty settlements and the Indian Act sheds lights on the gradual development of “institutionalized poverty” (Hungry Wolf, 1996, p. 79) through resource extraction (Anderson & Bone, 2009). Contemporary colonial enterprise continues the process. With the massive damming for hydropower, the Indigenous’ “life in harmony with nature” turned out to be “harder than ever to locate” (Hungry Wolf, 1996, p. 79). Kellough (1980) argues that colonialism is embedded within many kinds of colonial instruments which were produced to hinder the natural subsistence economy of the local Indigenous people.

Canadian Bill C-45, passed into law in 2012, can be considered as an addition to the Indian Act (Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013). The Bill has proposed changes to the Indian Act, involving changes to land and water resource management on First Nation reserves which will provide the Canadian federal government more control over reserve land and water resources (Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013).

Indigenous food sovereignty justifies people’s right to livelihood and country/traditional food. Sustainable livelihoods around food build the capacity of the community. In this context, we apply the sustainable livelihoods approach to understand how First Nation communities living under colonial policies can achieve well-being, reduce their vulnerability and challenge the discriminatory socio-economic situation imposed on them.

## **Sustainable Livelihoods Approach**

A sustainable livelihoods approach developed as a framework used as a means to identify the context and complexities of livelihood and wellbeing of rural people (Davies et al, 2008). The concept is defined as “the assets, the activities, and the access to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by an individual or household” (Ellis, 2000, p. 10). This approach is described through four major factors. A sustainable livelihoods approach:

- 1) Emphasizes that people live “within a vulnerability context” where they are “exposed to risks, through sudden shocks, trends over time and seasonal change” (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003, p. 187);
- 2) Defines how individuals have a number of assets or capitals, which support them to compose their livelihoods. The assets key to livelihoods are identified as natural, physical, human, financial, and social capitals;
- 3) Links these assets with people’s livelihood approaches which means the decisions and actions people take to fulfill or achieve livelihood outcomes;
- 4) Associates “policies, institutions and processes” responsible to shape “people’s access to assets and livelihood activities, as well as the vulnerability context in which they live” (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003, p. 187). Overall, the approach examines that livelihood can be sustainable “when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (Chamber & Conway, 1992, p. 7).

The original theory of sustainable livelihoods was criticized for not being a people- and community- centered approach (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003; Chambers, 1987) and defining well-being only through the lenses of “market production, salaried employment, and

cash income” (Davies et al., 2008, p. 56). This approach has been defined as “ethnocentric” and “reductionist” as it does not acknowledge the different strategies people practice to achieve livelihood security for example, hunting, fishing, land ownership, etc. (Davies et al., 2008, p. 57). However, environmental sustainability, participatory approaches to development allied with acknowledgement of local people’s knowledge and insights of sustainable well-being was discussed to broaden the sustainable livelihoods and resources management analysis (Davies et al., 2008).

The approach has been successfully used to understand poverty, rural development and environmental resource management in communities around the globe (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003). Recently this approach was applied to food sovereignty and the community economic development context of First Nation communities in Canada (Thompson et al., 2012). Scholars have taken a historical approach to address the deep-rooted issues of colonization (Ballard & Thompson, 2013; Davis et al., 2008; Thompson et al., 2012). Studies have attested that a livelihood analysis can be applied at the community and household levels to assess the policies causing poverty, food insecurity and underdevelopment on First Nation reserves (Ballard, 2012; Ballard & Thompson, 2013; Thompson et al. 2012). According to Sen (1983), food insecurity occurs when there are some changes in a person’s “endowment e.g., alienation of land, loss of labour power, ill health” or in “exchange entitlement (e.g., fall in wages, rise in food prices, loss of employment, drop in price of foods)” (as cited in Thompson et al. 2012, p. 48-49). Referring to this quote from Sen, Thompson et al. (2012) argue colonial institutional structures and processes undermine Indigenous on multiple levels to alienate them from land and food resources.

Sustainable livelihoods assets of First Nation communities differ greatly from those in other communities in Canada. The same year Canada placed number one on the Human Development Index (HDI), First Nation people living on reserves ranked sixty-third on this

same index (Cooke, Beavon & McHardy, 2004). This HDI, which is a composite analysis of life expectancy, education and economic indices intended to capture complexities of human capabilities and livelihood well-being, indicates the endowment sets or assets are very low in First Nation communities generally. This ranking alludes to Canada's Indigenous people having poor living conditions and high food insecurity comparable to the Third World.

## **Methods and Study Area**

The study applied community-based participatory research (CBPR) guided by OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) principles. Community-based participatory research is a research approach that inspires equal participation of research partners with “underlying goals of social change” (Castellano, 2004, p. 1394). OCAP principles, approved by the Steering Committee of the Indigenous Regional Longitudinal Health Survey in Canada, are research guidelines set to enhance First Nation peoples' equal participation in the research process. The guidelines suggest common ownership and possession of research information conducted with First Nation people (Schnarch, 2004). Both CBPR and OCAP principles are adopted in Indigenous research with positive reviews for its bottom-up approach where First Nation participants share equal control and ownership of the research (Castellano, 2004; Petrucka et al., 2012; Schnarch, 2004).

The country foods project was inspired by the findings of the research on food security (Thompson et al). The project was started when we received approval from the University of Manitoba Ethics Board, OPCN band council and the community in 2012. The first author began her fieldwork in May 2012 after ethics approval, completing fieldwork in August 2013. We started the participatory research process with a number of focus groups discussing the challenges of starting a community-based country food program. We conducted focus groups, semi-structured interviews and participant observation during

community gatherings throughout the fieldwork phase. Interview questions were articulated in an open-ended style based on people's experiences of food insecurity, flooding and other socio-economic challenges.

### ***O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation Background**

*O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN), (South Indian Lake community), was formed as a community in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Waldram, 1988, p. 117). Situated by Southern Indian Lake (see Figure 1 below), people's livelihoods in the settlement were established around hunting, fishing, and trapping (Waldram, 1985). Wild game was used mostly for domestic consumption (Waldram, 1985, 1988). Starting in 1942, OPCN had a commercial fishery famous for quality fresh water fish (Hoffman & Martin, 2012; Waldram, 1988). The community was food secure and had an active healthy lifestyle. OPCN elder Annie Spence who is 98 years old in 2014, shares stories about how before the flooding, the community was known for the high number of centenarians who lived a long life on land-based culture. With an abundance of natural resources, community members had a flourishing subsistence economy and longer life expectancy.

At present the settlement has a population of 767 (Statistics Canada, 2011). The community members are almost exclusively Indigenous peoples. OPCN is about 130 km Northwest of Thompson and 64 km from Leaf Rapids by air. Like many other reserve communities in northern Manitoba, OPCN is deprived of adequate transportation, housing and health care services.

## **Food Insecurity in OPCN Caused by Manitoba Hydro**

OPCN lost its food resources and subsistence economy due to a flood caused by Manitoba Hydro (Hoffman, 2008). Manitoba Hydro, supported by the Manitoba provincial government, developed a hydroelectric dam called the Churchill River Diversion (CRD) generating station in 1966 (Hoffman, 2008). The CRD created more energy on the Churchill River through water storage on South Indian Lake and by reversing the flow of the Churchill River (Hoffman, 2008; Lienafa & Martin, 2010). The process diverted most of the water from Churchill River into the Burntwood and Nelson River systems and use it at Nelson River generating stations. In this way the project was cost effective for Hydro since it did not have to build plants on the Churchill River (Hoffman, 2008). However, this resulted in the flooding of OPCN and other First Nation communities in the area.

Manitoba Hydro proceeded quickly with relocation, construction and then operation of water control structures and the Churchill River generation station. In comparison, compensation and accommodation of OPCN people was much slower. Since OPCN was not recognized as an autonomous band during the flooding and were situated on Crown land, community members were vulnerable to the province's decision of forced relocation from traditional home/camping areas to a new settlement (Hoffman & Martin, 2012, p. 37). This new location lacked adequate infrastructure for housing, schooling or running water and sewage to their homes.

The CRD made fishing and transportation impossible for OPCN and surrounding communities (Linklater, 1994). Water control structures changed the direction of the river's flow and increased its speed of flow. It also created massive debris due to flooding of wooded land, which made access difficult for small boats to reach a road to gain access to other centres. As a ferry was not available until 1977, the lakes effectively cut off access to other

communities. Like many other development projects in Canada, this project did not consider the long lasting environmental, cultural and economic repercussions to the Indigenous communities living in and around the “target” area (Hoffman & Martin, 2012).

People suffered property damage, destruction of their livelihoods and disruption of access to traditional diets and medicines. From the forced displacement to this day, OPCN suffers from housing shortages and lacks running water and sewage. The community currently has 155 houses for 767 people (Statistics Canada, 2011), with an average of 5.1 persons in each house. Compensation from Manitoba Hydro came 20 years after the flooding. Social, economic and cultural damages were severe by that time in OPCN (Hoffman, 2008). For 20 years in this forced relocation, the displaced community suffered tremendously without financial or other assistance to rebuild their lives and access their basic needs. The community’s basic economy, their domestic fishing industry was damaged. Like many other flooded CRD communities in northern Manitoba, loss of livelihood, land, traditional food and medicinal resources resulted in a number of suicides in the community during this time. Research has found that the suicide rate in northern Manitoba flooded communities is ten times higher than the Canadian national average (Mikkelson, 2005).

The procedure for compensation and agreement was also not without bias. As Waldram (1984) states, “The legal representation of the affected community was either omitted or impaired through poor advice, funding restrictions, legal stalling tactics and the refusal on the part of the Government to disclose the necessary information to allow the communities to properly define their legal positions” (as cited in Hoffman, 2008, p. 121).

## ***Ithinto Mechisowin* (Food from the Land) Program**

### **OPCN's Food Sovereignty Movement**

As a community, OPCN strives for “empowerment and reflexive action” (Lienafa & Martin, 2010, p. 58). After the flooding, community food champions and elders returned to their traditional methods of intergenerational knowledge exchange; they taught youth to harvest food and medicines from the land, to forming a local food movement. Like many other First Nation communities in Canada, this best practice was culturally-appropriate and well-accepted as a way of celebrating life during all seasons in OPCN (Hoffman, 2008; Lienafa & Martin, 2010; Waldram, 1985). The CRD flooding disrupted this cultural practice and disconnected people from land and land-based food. Land was too damaged to sustain them. Since the sense of well-being and community was replaced by colonial intrusions and disrupted family and community life, the community needed a shift towards traditional health and well-being.

*Kiwikapawetan* (a summer food and medicine harvesting youth camp started in 2006), and *Wassasihk* (summer youth food and medicine harvest with a particular focus on traditional ways of healing, started in 2005) are two major gatherings in OPCN focusing on retrieving land-based culture and reconnecting with traditional food. Initiatives like these suffer because of costly transportation and lack of logistic support for hunting, fishing or trapping. For the revival of the lost traditional food economy, a year-round seasonal program was suggested by the community. *Ithinto Mechisowin* was proposed by community champions and University of Manitoba researchers based on this idea and considering that country food programs are effective at improving food security (Thompson et al, 2012).

## Community Strategy for Livelihood Outcomes

The *Ithinto Mechisowin* program trains youth on traditional food harvesting. They participate in hunting, trapping and fishing workshops. These workshops are guided and supervised by elders and food champions. Food collected from the workshop is distributed to single mothers, low-income families and elders who suffer the most in regard to health and food access. Also, a youth gardening program, managed through the school in a nearby community Leaf Rapids, is collaborating and teaching the community hands-on gardening skills. The community school, health complex<sup>24</sup>, community band/local government, Fishermen's Association, Trappers' Association and community Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (ADI) program have supported the program by providing in-kind resources.

From May 2012 to June 2013, the program completed its planning (assessing available resources), operationalizing (preparing food handling area as per Health Canada regulations and apply for funding) and implementation (schedule and start workshop, hire coordinator and start workshops and food distribution) phases. Food collected during the workshops is labeled and stored in freezers purchased for the program. This program prioritizes elders' needs and prepares smoked fish/meat or any other traditional food requested by the community elders.

Storytelling and knowledge sharing is an essential part of these workshops. During the workshops, elders shared stories to teach participants about respecting the land and the ways of life before the flood. For example, elder Ross said during a beaver snaring workshop that, "Our stories teach our children about respecting animals, land, trees, water and they

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<sup>24</sup> The community health complex has been a major contributor to the program since its inception. All components of the Tommy Thomas Memorial Health Complex and community care have been providing in kind support to training activities, particularly the Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (ADI) Program. Besides the committee members, program finances and workshops are being supervised and evaluated by the Health Director of community health complex – Renee Linklater.

listen. We tell them [that the] beaver works hard to stay alive. You need to work hard too. We teach them [that] beaver meat is medicine for your body”. Community food champion and fisherman Steve, organizes muskrat trapping workshops in the spring. He said, “Each food harvested from the land has a story that teaches something to us.”

Food from the program is distributed to single mothers, low-income families and elders. Each household gets four fish fillets, four fish heads or two kilos of wild meat and seasonal berries and medicine if available. The program started distributing food in June 2013. From June to September the number of families receiving food from the program has grown rapidly from five families to 390 families. This indicates that the program has been successful, is providing healthy food to food insecure people and is giving them access to resources of which they were otherwise deprived.

*Ithinto Mechisowin*'s collaboration with OPCN's Oscar Blackburn School is noteworthy. In 2009, OPCN's Oscar Blackburn School created a course called the Alternative Life Skill Class that teaches students about traditional diet, arts and crafts and other skills of land-based culture. The course incorporated the *Ithinto Mechisowin*'s traditional food harvest trainings into the Alternative Life Skills credit program. For successful completion of the course, a student needs to take 55 hours of outdoor training with the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program. At the time of writing, 12 students from grade one to grade eight are participating in the course. This credit program has enrolled new students for 2014.

The community is taking ownership of the program as it creates a positive environment for the youth and the elders. Hilda Dysart, community elder and northern food champion said, “It teaches our youth to be happy and active, stay close to the family and serve the community responsibly. And harvest only what you need from the land.”

In 2014, the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program scheduled many seasonal food-harvesting workshops (hunting, fishing, smoking meat or fish, berry and medicine picking etc.) The program also accumulated financial resources to hire a youth coordinator for the summer and teach youth about the traditional perspective of sustainable harvest.

## **Discussion**

The sustainable livelihood approach is applied to analyze the effect of flooding and displacement and how that has impacted on loss and revival of livelihood assets and food sovereignty in OPCN. The status of the five sustainable livelihood assets in OPCN is:

- (1) Human capital comprises the abilities of well-being, knowledge and health of the people considering productivity of labour and physical capacity important for livelihood strategies. In OPCN human capital is low.

Compared to most areas in Canada OPCN suffers from lower education attainment, high unemployment and disease rates (Statistics Canada, 2011).

In 2009 a household food security survey found a 100% food insecurity rate in OPCN which is higher than the rest of the Canadian population

(Thompson et al., 2012);

- (2) Social capital means social resources (network, associations, relationships).

It contributes to cooperative action and builds social ties supportive to livelihood strategies. OPCN's history of collective living and the present day community activities is built on cultural and social bonds. However, the colonial and existing discriminatory judicial policies, lack of human capital and increased racism create challenges towards social resources and reduces social capital (Ballard, 2012; Thompson et al., 2011);

- (3) Natural capital is people's access to and everyday practice of natural and land resources that helps resource flow to make useful for sustainable livelihoods. OPCN has lost most of its natural resources due to hydro flooding. Like many other northern Manitoba reserve communities, they do not have any regulatory rights to their land and water resources (Ballard, 2012; LaDuke, 2002; Thompson et al., 2011). Continuous flooding by Manitoba Hydro and settler controlled development in the community are causing depletion of natural resources.
- (4) Physical capital means basic infrastructure and production equipment in a community. As a community OPCN suffers from housing shortages, unpaved roads, and unclean drinking water. These infrastructure deficits create additional barriers to people's livelihood and food security systems.
- (5) Financial capital refers to people's access to savings and credit, wages or income in a community. The loss of the fishing industry in OPCN took a heavy toll on the economy. People have lost their subsistence economy and more people are living on social welfare (Waldram, 1985). Additionally, because OPCN reserve housing and land are Crown property, local people do not have the right to leverage these resources to create credit or develop business (Ballard, 2012).

OPCN's *Ithinto Mechisowin* program applies an Indigenous lens to achieve food sovereignty and increase livelihood assets. This program is a step to regaining sovereignty over First Nation resources and land by revitalizing traditional food and community responsibilities. The program's success confirms that the sustainable livelihood framework is

an asset building approach that inspires community development in First Nation communities in Canada (Thompson et al., 2012).

The five key assets that were improved after the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program in OPCN are:

- *Human capital*: Through the program, youth, elders and adult food champions are getting opportunities to practice land-based food harvesting and preparation skills, which is strengthening their traditional livelihood. The *Ithinto Mechisowin* program creates institutional support for transferring Indigenous knowledge. The vision for the program has been to strengthen knowledge transmission, through existing resources and institutions rather than building upon a new model. Table 1 shows the number of different capacity building workshops organized by *Ithinto Mechisowin* program. Both youth and elders are coming out in great numbers.
- *Physical capital*: This program helped build a country food program house and centre with equipment (cutting boards, meat cutting machines, knives etc.) for program participants to harvest food from the land. As well as this centre established smoke houses, freezers to store food and community gardens for fresh produce during summer. This involved upgrading an existing building to provide a commercial and public kitchen space allowing for country food distribution. The space may be further modified to include a small restaurant and breast feeding centre – to provide much needed healthy food and a meeting place in the community, as well as support for breast feeding mothers.
- *Social capital*: Harvesting food from the land creates community bonding and challenges the colonial ways of living. The success of the program heavily

relied on the fact that key community members came together to teach land-based culture. The workshops provided through the program supported knowledge transmission between elders and youth. The program benefited from the collaboration between community institutions and non-Indigenous outsiders, in this case the University of Manitoba.

- *Financial capital:* The program started without any funding in 2012. The success, community bonding and networking with the University of Manitoba resulted in a partnership with interested non-governmental organizations who contributed funding to this project. Right now, the project has sufficient financial resources to run many workshops throughout the different seasons of the year. The program is also creating employment opportunities for the community. Program members are training themselves to write proposals and produce deliverables, etc. However, generally most settler funds and programs are not accepting of wild meat and do not fund fishing. More advocacy is required.
- *Natural capital:* The program provides opportunities to pay attention to local food production. The program started workshops for youth to know traditional methods of wildcrafting - tracking moose footprints and other wildlife, the art of picking medicines and preserving the growing area etc. As a result, their management and ownership of resources in their territories will become more pronounced. Regular and seasonal workshops are already starting to give people more access to land-based food, Table 2 shows the amount of country food distributed from the program from June to October 2014.

**Table 6-1: Number and types of workshops in the Ithinto Mechisowin program**

Type and number of workshops	Youth	Volunteer	Elder
Fishing (15)	55	11	9
Smoking fish or meat (10)	20	6	6
Hunting (9)	14	4	6
Gardening (12)	31	10	3
Berry Picking (5)	13	2	0
Medicine picking (1)	10	2	1

**Table 6-2: Country Food Distribution in OPCN over five months**

MONTH	HOUSEHOLD	FAMILY MEMBERS	AMOUNT DISTRIBUTED 4 fish, 4 fish head, 2-4 KG meat per pack
JUNE	5	20	10
JULY	27	351	55
AUGUST	30	390	66
SEPTEMBER	35	385	63
OCTOBER	26	286	49

An essential part of Indigenous food sovereignty is cultural integrity (Morrison, 2011). Through the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program, OPCN has cultivated its strength of cultural identity and gained a community focused resurgence alternative to Canadian state hegemony. The community's desire for cultural integrity provided the possibility for a food sovereignty platform in OPCN. However, natural assets and wild food supply are still being undermined by lack of control over the land and water in their territory. Many people complained about Manitoba Hydro controlling water levels to maximize its revenue, against natural cycles. The fish eggs are exposed when Manitoba Hydro reduces water levels every

spring during spawning season. This destruction of fish eggs reduces fish populations and thus food supply.

To reduce people's vulnerability, the sustainable livelihood framework suggests capacity building and gaining wide support networks. OPCN's *Ithinto Mechisowin* program benefitted from support from many sources (school, University of Manitoba, health complex). This program shows that the success of the local food sovereignty and community economic development program is conditional on thoughtful planning, resource assessment, resource accumulation and the wise selection of allies in Indigenous and settler communities. With Hydro acting as a colonial power to undermine community resources through repeated flooding due to hydro-electrical dams (Ballard & Thompson, 2013) for example, support to rebuild a community inspired plan for a collaborative project with settlers is required. However, capacity is important that their participation and political realization comes out of the lived realities of a remote, food-insecure First Nation community. As settlers, they need to understand the privileges sustained at the cost of Indigenous land and food resources. This process can help bring institutions to engage in community and to use social and political capital.

## **Conclusion**

The *Ithinto Mechisowin* program is a community program formed through collaboration with many different OPCN organizations and the University of Manitoba. This program was created to improve food security, sustainable livelihoods and food sovereignty. This case study explores the potential of the sustainable livelihoods approach as a means for participatory engagement of researchers with local people and for deepened perception of the subtleties of local socio-economic systems through a food sovereignty program.

The analysis of Indigenous food sovereignty and sustainable livelihoods indicated that the land-based harvesting program built capacity and assets in the community (Ballard & Thompson, 2013; Thompson et al., 2012). Community economic development based on traditional land based food harvesting practices produced sustainable livelihoods assets, thus building capacity for future generations. The country food program, by distributing food to people in need, is increasing food security and creating community bonding and knowledge transmission for all participants.

The *Ithinto Mechisowin* program has developed a local food economy that is alternative to the Canadian state hegemony and global food economy. OPCN's desire for cultural integrity resulted in the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program and a food sovereignty platform in the community (Morrison, 2011). Here, this culturally-appropriate food program played the role of the mediator influencing all five livelihood assets. Following cultural traditions resides at the heart of the Indigenous food system and contributes to the contemporary analysis of a sustainable livelihoods approach (Davis et al., 2008).

By linking to existing institutions and expertise, this food program is considered sustainable over the short term. However to be sustainable over the long term – the First Nation has to gain control over natural resources and land management in its territory. OPCN, which is heavily impacted by the Manitoba Hydro water control structure, should have the defining voice in determining the water levels of the lake it lives by. Manitoba Hydro is controlling water levels to maximize energy production and its revenue. Changing water levels every spring during spawning season reduces fish populations when fish eggs are exposed, negatively impacting the food supply and the community's fishing economy. Despite the detrimental effects, Manitoba Hydro's plans for the creation of new dams in northern Manitoba are continuing, exclusively for export purpose (Birnie, 2014; Kulchyski, 2013). A proper "mitigation" plan is required for the hydro flooded communities in northern

Manitoba (Kulchysiki, 2014). Communities should receive equal revenue profit and be part of every decision making process concerning any mitigation plan to reduce destruction of natural resources and should be informed and consent to the development prior to its implementation.

The community based participatory research approach allowed the first author to learn about the value of land-based food from OPCN elders. Besides witnessing as a researcher, she helped with proposal writing, advocating, and worked towards approvals from Manitoba Conservation and Public Health Inspectors for this program. The collaboration involved advocacy, which was needed to obtain resources for OPCN and access to country foods. Most importantly, this collaboration witnessed, documented and created awareness of the acute socioeconomic discrimination of First Nation people in northern Manitoba (Thompson et al., 2011). The collaboration strengthens social capital and supports OPCN's community economic development plan.

This research shows that programming in Indigenous communities, when community inspired and reflective of their traditions, can be successful. Non-Indigenous people have a role in building capacity where needed based on community goals. When settlers work as partners towards community goals, a small step is taken to return the freedoms that have been stolen and to use social and political capital more effectively to build support for Indigenous in settler society. The participation and political realization in community life by settlers should acknowledge that their benefits have been at the cost of First Nation land and food resources and is unjust. Future research and dialogue is needed to have First Nation peoples' right to land and water resources restored to ensure food sovereignty. Sustainable livelihoods and an Indigenous food sovereignty analysis can contribute to the required institutional change.

## **Author's Acknowledgement**

The following discussion is an outcome of my discussions with OPCN community members and their thoughts on Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. While writing about sustainable livelihoods framework regarding OPCN, I realized that the cultural nuances can provide a richer analysis of livelihoods understanding. This idea was furthered from a discussion with Tabitha Martens, a Cree scholar and food sovereignty activist. Tabitha told me, "People in OPCN will not talk about different 'capitals of sustainable livelihoods framework' in their everyday conversation, that is why they cannot relate to it. But they can talk about resources in their own terms and it is important to include them in the analysis." (*T. Martens, personal communication, November 2014*). We both agreed that we should put this idea on paper. After I prepared the first draft of our idea, Tabitha reviewed and we submitted the work to the Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development for publication. While writing the first draft I have discussed the paper idea with Rene Linklater, Hilda Dysart, Shirley Ducharme, Barb Spence and Steve Ducharme. I am very thankful especially to Hilda Dysart and Shirley Ducharme for their time to analyze the Cree terms with me.

## **6.2 Rethinking Sustainable Livelihoods Framework<sup>25</sup>**

### **Introduction**

The association of resource-led development with topics such as capitalism, strategies of the colonial state, the rise of transnational market economies, neo-liberal policies of ecological, cultural genocide and corporate control over local resources is not a new

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<sup>25</sup> Kamal, A. G., Martens, T. and Ithinto Mechisowin Committee. (2015) Rethinking Sustainable Livelihoods Framework: An Indigenous Perspective, *The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, 9(2), 51-64.

phenomenon (Shiva, 2002; Escobar, 1995; Harvey, 2003). From Marxism to contemporary Indigenous studies literature, the exploitation of natural resources and its disastrous impact over the culture and livelihoods of marginalized population has been documented (Marx 1976 [1867]; Churchill, 1983; Waldram, 1988; Escobar, 1995; Shiva, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Kulchyski, 2005; Kulchyski, 2013; Coulthard, 2014; Kamal, Linklater, Thompson, Dipple, & *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program, 2015).

Emerging studies in social and environmental science show that Indigenous communities, living in resource rich countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and America are experiencing socioeconomic and cultural challenges within the newly reformed resource-led world order, often more than the Third World countries and non-Indigenous population, due to state surveillance and unsupportive colonial regulations (Escobar, 1995; Hall & Patrinos, 2010; Gilberthorpe & Hilson, 2014).

Livelihood discourse connected with resource-led development not only expresses concerns over the damaging environmental and socioeconomic consequences but also finds its major analytical tool, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) insufficient to study structural discrimination (Davies, White, Wright, Maru, & LaFlamme, 2008; Daskon, 2008; Scoon, 2009; Sakdapolrak, 2014; Wilshusen, 2014). SLF is linked to a top down western development agenda, often promoting a narrow analysis of the term “capital” (ibid). Within this context our concern is to examine how successfully livelihoods studies can be used in a development-led framework while analyzing Indigenous livelihood challenges.

By sharing the story of *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN), an Indigenous community situated in remote northern Manitoba, Canada, and its local food program *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program (IMP) we explore the ways in which Indigenous perspectives can contribute to livelihoods analysis. Indigenous culture in Canada embeds livelihoods and

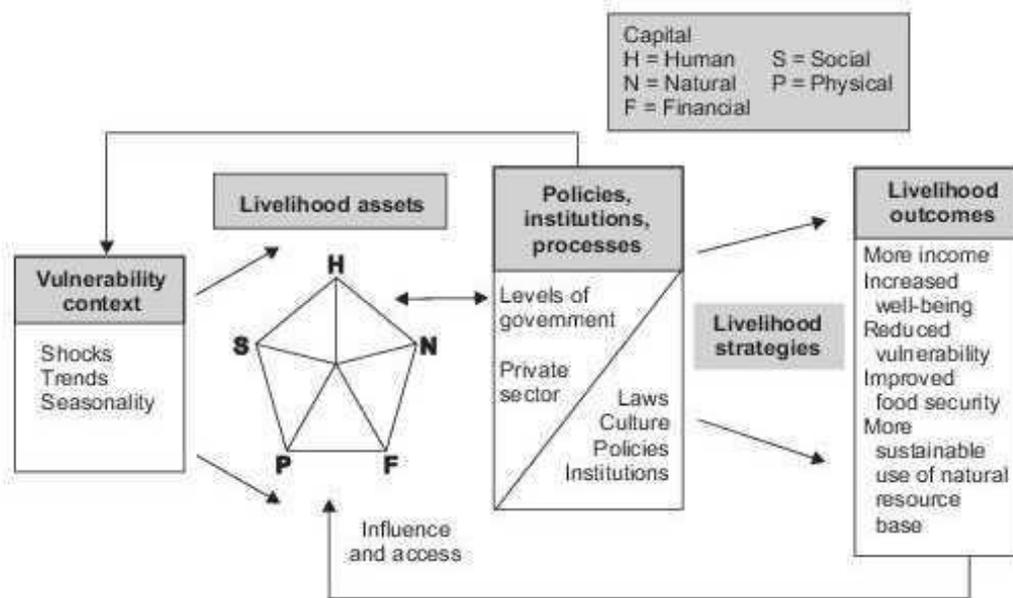
wellbeing with people's deep relationship with the land (Adelson, 2000; Kovach, 2005; Wilson, 2008; Hart, 2010; Simpson, 2011, Kamal et al., 2015). This relationship is being disrupted Canada-wide by resource-led industrial projects such as mining and hydroelectric dams within areas specified by the government for traditional land use, without proper consultation or adequate and meaningful compensation or mitigation plans (Waldram, 1988; Hoffman, 2008; Kulchyski, 2013; Kamal, Thompson, Linklater & *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program, 2014; Kamal et al. 2015). We argue that for an ethical understanding of development politics, livelihood studies related to Indigenous communities should take a bottom up approach, be supple and variable in its analysis, not use a fixed framework and provide a culturally appropriate meaning of "asset"/"capital."

To make these claims the first section of the article will discuss the concept of capital used in livelihood studies. Following this, the article will share the significance of Indigenous worldviews. Next, it will describe methodology and community history. Later, elaboration on how OPCN's collective cultural practices can contribute to livelihood studies will be presented. The concluding section will summarize our argument.

### **Capital in the context of SLF**

From its origin, the term capital is linked with "a material holding or monetary fund" (Williams, 1976, p.51). German sociologist Karl Marx defined capital in relation to "capitalism," an economic system that magnifies natural resource exploitation by using capital to monopolize, control production price and manipulate wage-labour relations (Marx, 1976 [1867]). A Marxist understanding of capital paved the way for in-depth analysis on capital and its relationship with capitalism in resource-led economies in different disciplines. However, in livelihood studies, the understanding and functionality of the term "capital" has remained inadequate (Scoon, 2009; Wilshusen, 2014; Sakdapolrak, 2014). The concept is

contested and being reviewed by contemporary scholars, particularly in the application of the SLF analysis (ibid).



**Figure 6-3: DFID sustainable livelihoods framework**

Source: Carney, 1998

The notion of capital was introduced in livelihood and development studies through the World Bank’s (WB) report “*Expanding the Measure of Wealth*” (World Bank, 1997; Wilshusen, 2014, p. 133). The report suggested that people’s sustainable development could be assessed “based on relative endowment of four capitals: produced, human, natural and social” (World Bank ,1997, p. v; Wilshusen, 2014, p. 133). The interpretation emphasized capitalist accumulation of resources rather than meaningful sustainability (Bebbington, 1999; Wilshusen, 2014). It is reasonable to argue that the WB played a role in manufacturing information/knowledge to benefit development-led capitalism (Esteva, 1992; Goldman, 2005; Wilshusen, 2014). The plan was to bring in a major shift in the language and mode of capitalist growth to maintain a continuously homogenous and liner reality of the world in which the developed West was authorized to plan, exploit and decide for the “underdeveloped” (Sachs, 1992, p. 2; Esteva, 1992, p.16). As Trinh (1989) said, “the concept

that is currently named ‘development’ has gone through six stages of metamorphosis since late antiquity. The perception of the outsider as the one who needs help has taken on the successive forms of the barbarian, the pagan, the infidel, the wild man, the ‘native’, and the underdeveloped” (p. 54).

This argument attests to how the camouflaging and manipulative nature of capitalism feeds on the “other” and the fact that the WB’s problematic involvement in development was actually an investment of capitalist endeavor.

**Table 6-3: Different types of capitals in a Sustainable Livelihoods Framework**

(Inspired by Davies et al., 2008; Sakdapolrak, 2014; Wilshusen, 2014)

<b>Capitals/Assets</b>	<b>Definition of resources</b>	<b>Some examples</b>
Natural	Supplies of natural resources	Fisheries, land, gas, minerals.
Physical	Man-made resources	School, office space, library etc.
Human	Knowledge, skills gained by training, education	Gardening, farming, hunting, fishing, reading, writing etc.
Economic/ financial	Monetary supplies	Money, saving bonds, credits etc.
Social	Network of trust and reciprocity in a social group	Community safe walk group, women’s rights groups, community coops, community kitchen etc.
Cultural	Everyday practices and communitarian interactions that shapes identity	Rituals, celebrations based on class, race, gender, ethnicity and religion.

The WB’s Department of International Development and Institute of Development Studies (DFID) in Sussex designed the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) as a key analytical tool of livelihood studies (Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003; Scoon, 2009; Sakdapolrak, 2014). SLF was introduced to measure assets/capitals (social, physical, natural, human and financial) as well as adaptive strategies and technologies to mend asset insecurity in livelihoods of marginalized population (Chambers & Conway, 1992). In some studies, culture

is also considered one of the capitals (Davies et al., 2008; Daskon & McGregor, 2012; Wilshusen, 2014). Table 1 summarizes definitions of capitals according to SLF and provides a few examples of their use in livelihood activities.

In SLF, livelihood is perceived as “the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living” (Chambers & Conway, 1992, p. 7). SLF suggests that a livelihood is sustainable “when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resources base” (ibid). The assets or capitals, which refer to a stock of resources, are explained as “input,” through a pentagon shape model and used to measure availability of assets and enhance livelihood strategies of people as outcomes (DFID, 1997; DFID, 1999; DFID, 2000a; DFID, 2000b; DFID, 2000c; DFID, 2000d; Chamber & Conway, 1992; Brockiesby & Fisher, 2003; Davis et al. 2008; Scoon, 2009; Wilshusen, 2014). Analysis of cross-sectoral policies to improve livelihoods of the affected population is also a part of a SLF analysis (Chamber, 2005).

Despite its wide application in development studies, SLF has been criticized for its limitations in mainstream research (Davis et al., 2008; Daskon, 2008; Scoon, 2009; Wilshusen, 2014, Sakdapolrak, 2014, Kamal, et al., 2014). An elaborate discussion on the topic is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we will discuss some key points from the asset model.

At the early stage of SLF, people’s livelihoods were analyzed through diagrams, charts or graphs, or guidance sheets (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2011). In a technical analysis “measurable” (for example, physical, financial) and “non-measurable” (for example, social or cultural) capitals are kept on the same list (ibid). This gave an

“illusionary equivalency” to all kinds of capitals and hence reduces the potential of an in depth analysis of historical and structural power relationships (Wilshusen, 2014, p. 138).

The asset model is marked for being narrowly focused and unelaborated (Daskon 2008; Scoon, 2009; Sakdapolrak, 2014, p. 21). It is argued that the simplified and static analysis of the asset pentagon by DFID shifts focus from people and sidelines disputes around the contested role of capital in society (Sakdapolrak, 2014; Wilshusen, 2014). It limits livelihoods discussions in the “territory of economic analysis” (Scoon, 2009, p. 177), defines capital as a monetary object rather than an exploitative course of development (Harvey, 2010).

Additionally, livelihood consists of both material and non-material characteristics of well-being (Bebbington, 1999; Daskon, 2008; Sakdapolrak, 2014). As Bebbington (1999) said, assets can mean “hermeneutic” and “emancipatory” action through which people can define their unique way of living and resist against socially embedded power structures (p. 2022). Daskon (2008) argues that for a holistic and deep understanding of sustainable livelihoods “social, economic, cultural and spiritual needs of all members of a community, human, non-human, present and future” – and safeguarding their “cultural and biological diversity” is essential (p. 172). A holistic perception of livelihood can be acquired by local understanding/nuance of the livelihood and asset requirement without which a community is gravely misunderstood.

### **Indigenous Worldview and Indigenous livelihoods**

From an Indigenous worldview, sustainable livelihoods are viewed in terms of relationships emphasizing “the resource base, ecosystem services, people and other species” and “not just an efficient allocation of resources over time, but also a fair distribution of

resources and opportunities between the current generation and between present and future generations" (Milne, Tregidga & Walton, 2004, p. 5-6).

An Indigenous perception of livelihoods tend to rest on a sense of egalitarianism where all factors (physical, natural, economic, social, and human) in the sustainability wheel are perceived in the form of one bond or relationship (Manitoba Education and Training, 2000). This relationship exists between the physical environment and Indigenous knowledge where sustainability and a balanced ecosystem are shared responsibilities of all living beings (individual, community, animal, land, water, air, fire) (Manitoba Education and Training, 2000). People acting in accordance with cultural worldviews and values is key to maintaining a healthy livelihood and community.

Livelihood, for Indigenous people is more than subsistence economy; it involves the explicit cultural integration between nature and people, a respectful bond based on interdependency (Adelson, 2000; Hart, 2010; Simpson, 2011). For example, the Cree notion of sustainable well-being is defined by the term *mino-pimatisiwin* which means good life (Hart, 2002). It is an understanding based on sharing and tied into reciprocity with nature, balance, growth, and spirituality; these are some asset components that guide Cree community and individuals towards a sustainable, healthy and healing lifecycle (ibid, 105). Any injustice related to this system, thus, is injustice to the people, their community and "upon Creation itself" (Mcgregor, 2009, p. 28 quoted in Connelly, Markey & Roseland, 2011, p. 43). This takes the Indigenous perception of sustainable livelihoods beyond the classical notion of asset and capital defined in SLF.

With the growing acknowledgement of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous worldview, the need for incorporating cultural viewpoints of livelihoods is more important than ever. Studies concerning Indigenous wellbeing, sovereignty, culture and livelihoods in

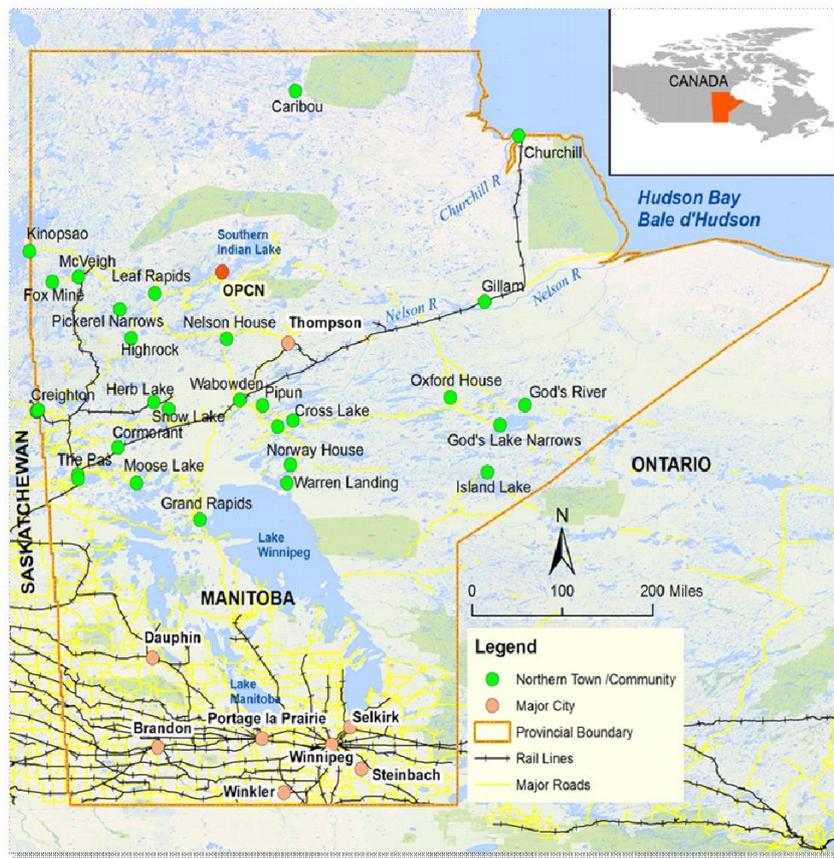
Canada are revealing alarming sustenance crises which need immediate attention (Fraser, Dougilla, Mabeeb, Reeda, & McAlpinec, 2006; Capistrano & Charles, 2012; Thompson, Gulrukh, Ballard, Beardy, Islam, Lozeznik & Wong, 2011; Thompson, Kamal, Wiebe, & Alam, 2012; Thompson & Ballard, 2013; Kamal et al., 2014; Parlee, 2015). However, it is important to realize that the gap in SLF will not be fulfilled until cultural integration in Indigenous livelihoods is meaningfully infused in such studies. Moreover, as Wilshusen (2014) said, any form of capital associated with human livelihood must challenge the dual nature of the term, essentially because of its ties with a capitalist resource-led economy (p. 140).

## **Methodology**

The study with OPCN is guided by Indigenous research methodology. Indigenous research methodology is founded on “relational accountability” and collective, collaborative way of acquiring knowledge (Kovach, 2005; Wilson, 2008; Hart, 2010, p. 9). Through relational accountability, there is an acknowledgment that relationships exist between researchers and participants, but also to the land, water and beyond. Simpson provides five stages of Indigenous research: collaboration, consensual decision -making, apprenticeship with Elders and seeking out community experts and learning by doing (Simpson, 2000, p. 173-179). While conducting this study we have followed these steps.

Historically, Indigenous ways of knowing have been affronted and side lined by western scientific research (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Hart, 2010). In contemporary academia, ethical and scholarly rights to Indigenous research are most often established through OCAP (ownership, control, access and possession) principles (Schnarch, 2004). Participatory research is an integral part of livelihood studies (Scoon, 2009, p. 172). However, the idea of ethical participatory research is debated and labelled as “tyrannical”

(Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Brock, 2002, Scoon, 2009). An Indigenous research framework can enrich the integration of participatory research in livelihood studies.



**Figure 6-4: Study area**

Source: Kamal et al. (2014, p. 144)

The study with OPCN was conducted using an Indigenous research methodology and led by OCAP. One of the objectives of the project was to collaborate with OPCN and to learn from their program and community while creating a local food harvesting and food sharing program to support their *mino-pimatisiwin*, or “good life.” The fieldwork was conducted from 2012-2014. During the entire fieldwork period, the project was supervised, led and operated by community Elders and food champions, and by a steering committee that was formed for consensual decision-making.

The program provides training on traditional food harvesting and preparation skills. The Elders share stories while teaching youth, thus promoting intergenerational knowledge. Harvested food is shared with low-income families, Elders and diabetes patients once a week. The study was a collaborative initiative between the University of Manitoba and OPCN and was part of Asfia Kamal's doctoral research. Knowledge gathered for this paper came out of five years of relationship building with OPCN Elders, adults and youth and participation in traditional food harvesting activities.

### **Community history**

OPCN, a remote northern Manitoba Indigenous reserve community, suffered severe flooding caused by the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the region (Waldram, 1988; Hoffman, 2008; Kamal et al., 2014; Kamal et al., 2015) The flooding resulted in relocation of the community, disassociation from land-based culture, reduced access to wild food, unemployment, inadequate housing and health services (Thompson et al., 2011; Kamal et al., 2014; Kamal et al. 2015). Poverty, a health crisis, and food insecurity are major issues in the community (ibid). Despite these challenges, OPCN continues to practice their land-based culture by passing on knowledge to the youth (Kamal et al., 2014; Kamal et al., 2015). In order to do so, they have been participating in land-based activities through seasonal traditional gatherings. In 2013, a community-based food-harvesting program called *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program (IMP), which means food from the land, was created. The program was envisioned and planned solely by OPCN. It started with the in-kind support from community members and community based organizations and later received some funding from non-governmental organizations (ibid).

### **OPCN's livelihoods perspective:**

It has been argued, specifically for food studies, that using traditional languages helps present a more complete story of the experiences of a community (Power, 2008). OPCN's way of living revolves around four major concepts, presented in this paper in their Cree language. First is *Kistihdiminowok*, which means the foundation of relationship is respect. The concept describes a practice in the community that all living and natural beings are related to each other based on how they respect each other. *Okanatawewoh* is the second concept that indicates the major principle of understanding that a respectful relationship includes taking care of Mother Nature. The word refers to someone who responsibly cares for nature. The third concept is *Wichihituwin* which explains the idea of resources in the community. The meaning of the word is something that is used to help another being in the community. This explains what people should do to maintain a respectful relationship, and demonstrates the value of caring for and helping others. *Wichihituwin* could be used to describe a number of things, from food to labour to a library or a book. This connotes the culture of being well collectively by the practice of sharing. *Pasekonekewin* is the word that refers to the outcome of the relationship. The word means taking someone by the hand and supporting him/her to stand. The outcome brings strength that helps people to sustain their challenges. Together, these four concepts define *Kakiesipimatisihk* which means "the way we live," or culture. In an ideal situation OPCN would like to have governance that is based on these understandings. The table below shows how IMP activities are enhancing livelihood relationship in OPCN.

**Table 6-4: Enhancing livelihood relationship with IMP**

OPCN world view	Concepts in Cree	Relationship	Elaboration	IMP's contribution to livelihoods relationship
<p><i>Kakiesipimatisihk</i> The way we live, culture of sharing</p>	<p><i>Kistihdiminowok</i> Respecting each other</p>	Relationship defined for individual	Individuals use of land and water and food and act towards community need	Bringing in community individuals in the program activities as trainer, volunteer and participants.
	<p><i>Okanatawewoh</i> Taking care of Mother nature</p>	Relationship between a community and nature	Sustainable concept of conservation which means land, water, animals are part of the community	IMP has created a policy that is based on OPCN worldview- for example, harvest what you need and responsibly
	<p><i>Wichihituwin</i> Something that helps another person</p>	Relationship between community, individuals and non-human	Purpose of money, food, labour, office space, book, social support, water, tree, medicine is validated when it is shared to help the other	IMP is contributing to the common culture of sharing. The hunting, fishing, berry picking activities strengthening bond between youth, elders and adults. As a community the IMP office has become a space of social gathering over food and traditional activities.
	<p><i>Pasekonekewin</i> Taking someone by the hand and supporting him or her to stand</p>	Relationship between community, youth and knowledge	Purpose of relationship is to achieve good life and share knowledge with youth by teaching them why the <i>Wichihituwin</i> concept is needed in a community	Low income families, Elders, single parents, diabetes patients are having access to healthy traditional food, which paves the way for physical and mental healing.

## **Rethinking the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach:**

The sustainable livelihoods practiced through IMP is a process of well-being through relationships—personal, interpersonal and collective. The only factor or “capital” that matters in the livelihood process is relationship—how the relationship with the world is viewed and how people are taking care of this relationship. Importantly, despite being regarded as having a livelihood disorder and acute poverty, OPCN has dared to start a community initiative with no mention of material capital. As IMP advisor Elder Vivian Moose said, “We need a promise to come together for our future and a name in Cree” (V. Moose, personal communication, 2012).

Certainly, this raises the question of whether Indigenous people are denying the idea of using money for progress. The answer is no. However, they do not place excessive growth and economic advancement as the most essential part of their lives. OPCN people do not care that people are empowered by having enough of the material capitals, but rather what their relationship with the capitals is. Elder Vivian’s statement attests to the fact that OPCN’s notion of well-being is effective and meaningful only when the economic empowerment contributes to cultural integrity, peoplehood and self-determination (Corntassel, 2012). Hence, even the metaphorical association of the term capital to assess their livelihood can be foreign and disempowering for them.

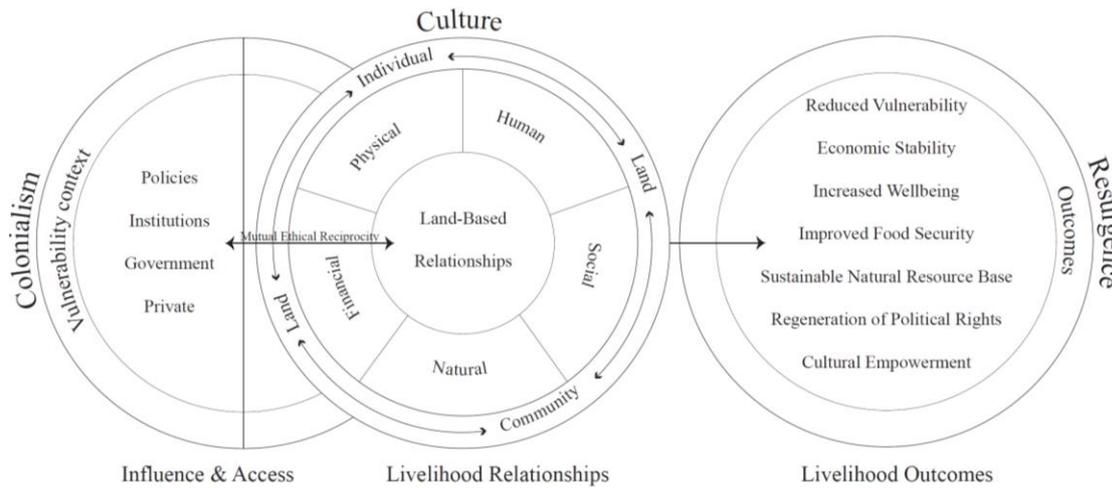
If we replace the term capital with the term relationship we bring about all possible answers to the livelihood wheel—relationships with society (community, land, water, animals), relationships with humans (how people use their labour for collective being), relationships with money (what role money is playing to keep the cultural practices) and relationships with nature (how relationships with nature is tied with food, friendship, families and health of nature). Indeed, as Anderson (2000) notes: “We exist because of and for the

relationships we hold with everything around us” (p.46). The creation of IMP is the outcome of these relationships, reproduced knowledge that is helping them to heal from existing crises and shock.

OPCN’s language in everyday life works as a metaphor that influences people’s thoughts and actions. It helps to shape their worldview. For example, during a traditional food preparation workshop in IMP, OPCN food champion Hilda Dysart shared that the Cree word for medicinal Labrador tea is *Mawkopatikwa* which means something to keep forever. If this information were analysed by mainstream livelihoods research considering *Mawkopatikwa* as “natural capital,” it would not explain the significance of the name of the medicine, nor why it has thrived for centuries as a medicine or the severity of loss that occurs when these medicines and other traditional food are flooded by hydroelectric dam construction. Establishment of the IMP program is reproducing traditional knowledge providing opportunities for relationship.

Contextually, Indigenous livelihood factors should be identified based on their wellbeing perspective: which part of relationship is keeping them well, which relationships are creating barriers to their well-being and most importantly, those relationships that are nourishing their self-determination in the midst of what OPCN people consider to be such social, cultural, political, economic and environmental challenges. The emphasis should be on the process of gaining strength for livelihoods instead of the deficit and crisis aspects. Process is critical to the understanding of Indigenous knowledge and is necessary in understanding Indigenous research. This means SLF should be remodelled and used for assessing livelihoods and changing policies to benefit sustainable, thriving and culturally rich people instead of “maximizing the benefit of the poor, hungry and vulnerable” (Simmons, 2007, p. 29).

## O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation Sustainable Livelihood Framework



**Figure 6-5: OPCN's perspective of sustainable livelihoods framework**

Source: Kamal, 2016

For a methodology to be essential to Indigenous communities it must be relevant and meaningful rather than a definition composed of technical terms unrelated and unexplained to the people whose life is being analyzed. Hart (2010) has argued that Indigenous research values must include, in part, “Indigenous control over research, which can be demonstrated by having Indigenous people developing, approving, and implementing the research” (p.9). For example, while discussing sustainable livelihoods through IMP, OPCN people have used the tree as a metaphor to explain their roots, livelihoods and collective wellbeing, with the insight of IMP woven into this paper as a relation and an author. While writing this paper I developed the framework above as an example of a culturally embedded livelihood framework to integrate an interpretation of history and politics of Indigenous livelihoods in Canada and a path towards possible resurgence. This framework was prepared, reviewed and approved by the *Ithinto Mechisowin* Committee after the paper was published (hence is not included in the original publication

and added to this chapter later) on the basis that they can “relate to the shape and analysis of this photo” (R. Linklater, personal communication, May 29, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

Although the SLF analysis is gradually changing in tone, based on critiques from past and contemporary scholars (Bagchi, 1998; Scoon, 2009; Wilshusen, 2014; Sakdapolrak, 2014), in many studies the analysis continues to fixate on the asset pentagon, a “formula/checklist” that fails to address the impact of capitalism in the social order (Wilshusen, 2014). OPCN’s case study attests to the loose extension of the term capital with any livelihoods factors (social, cultural, physical, human, financial or natural) an illusionary projection of empowerment.

Throughout the article, we have tried to emphasize that Indigenous livelihood is engraved in cultural practices, sovereignty and self-determination (Corntassel, 2008; Kamal et. al. 2015). For Indigenous peoples, livelihood is sustainable when cultural practices are performed in a sovereign land and the livelihood methods are self-determined. OPCN started IMP with little outside “capital” and started to work towards their self-determined needs using existing and new relationships in the community. IMP paves the way for livelihoods capability beyond capitalist aspirations, even within modern state regimes. This highlights the strength of culturally relevant participatory studies based on Indigenous relationships and sense of community.

Finally, our discussion reasserts the importance of enriching the body of literature that can invest in the methods of applying SLF for cultural integration of thoughts and making room for ethical, participatory and nonlinear approaches. This process is crucial particularly in the era of contemporary colonialism as Indigenous views of sustainability and Indigenous knowledge are continually denied at the international level, with Indigenous sovereignty and

cultural rights overshadowed by state regulations (Corntassel, 2014; Kamal et al. 2015). The lacunae in the Millennium Development Goals, discriminatory modern treaties for Indigenous peoples at the state level are some examples in this context (Corntassel, 2014, p. 69). There is a need, and moreover, a great opportunity for Indigenous research and worldviews to contribute to livelihood analysis as presented by community, and particularly through traditional languages. It is here, that research on livelihood studies should shift and be part of the “decolonization” process (Settee, 2013; Absolon, 2010; Kovach, 2005; Smith, 1999).

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## 7. Resurgence



**Figure 7-1: Ithinto Mechisowin wild food recipe calendar 2015**

*Our strength is our experience. We saw how things were before the Hydro. We lived it then and we are living it now. And did not lose our focus and learned the hard way to hold on to this community. Now it's our children and grandchildren's turn. They need to live their experience and keep their focus to the community.*

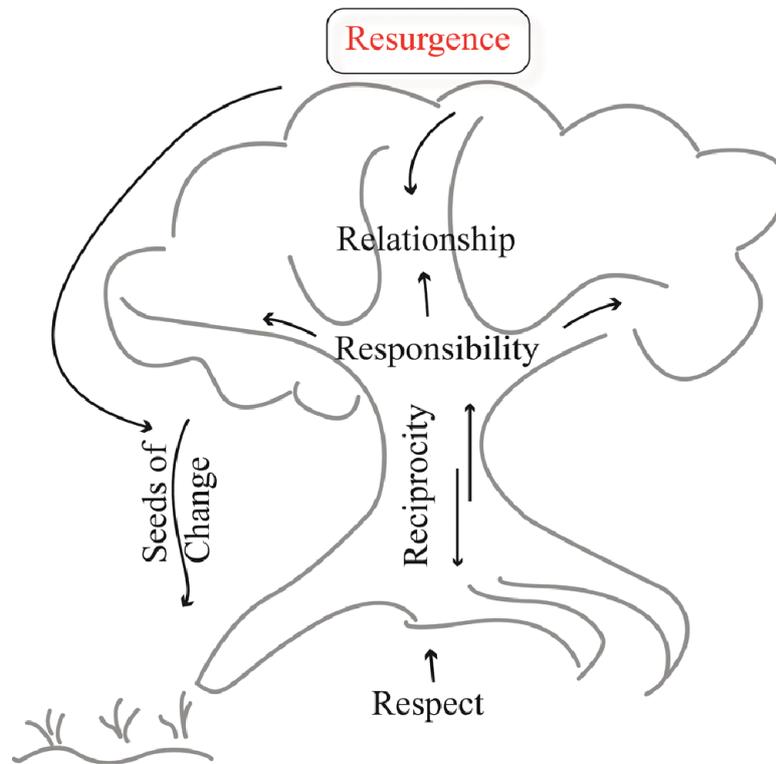
*Elder William Dysart, personal communication, August 1, 2012*

## **Hungry Wisahkicahk**

**Story teller: Barb Spence**

*One day Wisahkicahk was wandering around in the forest and he heard someone's voice. He went closer and saw some plants talking to each other. The plants said, brother, how are you, what are you doing? Wisahkicahk said, What will happen if I eat you all! They said, well, then you will fart very loudly. Wisahkicahk did not listen and ate the plants. Then he became hungry again, so he went to track caribou herd, but every time he came close, he farted loudly and couldn't catch any. That must be the Wisahkicahk, the caribou and the forest animals thought. Wisahkicahk did not get anything to eat that day.*

B. Spence, personal communication, November 19, 2013



**Figure 7-2: Tree of Knowledge (Resurgence)**

### Chapter summary

OPCN’s cultural stories, philosophies and principles carry many dimensions of teaching as expressed through Cree terms in this thesis: *Wichihituwin* (a thing that can be used to help another person), *okanatawewoh* (taking care of Mother Nature), *pasekonekewin* (helping someone stand) or *kistihdiminowk* (respecting each other).

In this final chapter I would like to reemphasize the fact that despite the existing colonial challenges the *Ithinto Mechisowin* food sovereignty program generates a way to practice these teachings. OPCN’s teaching in everyday life is a process that involves people

from all generations. This teaching process is a resurgence which is a progression that continuously creates connections between community, land and culture and generates purpose for countless selfless acts and commitments. The local cultural activities that the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program inspires intersect and can influence larger social, political and historical processes.

Resurgence regenerates the seeds of change, and provides alternatives to capitalist resource accumulation. I understand that if a non-indigenous entity or individual is connected to the resurgence process, it requires deeper political and personal commitment. When an indigenous non-indigenous relationship is built based on mutual respect and reciprocity, the outcome of such connection can be tremendous.

In this chapter I have discussed works of Indigenous scholars to understand the above argument. In reference to different chapters in the thesis I have elaborated on why I think the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program encourages resurgence and what role resource management bodies, academic and community based researchers can play to bring a just social order to create space for equal and culturally appropriate food system.

### **7.1 *Understanding Resurgence***

To begin, it is important to understand that resurgence is highly valued in the contemporary Indigenous sovereignty movement for having, at its heart, an alternative anticolonial, anti-statist way of life. Indigenous scholars see resurgence as a collective knowledge-in-action process that transcends individuals through conscious acts taken in everyday life (Alfred, 2009; Corntassel, 2012, Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2011). The practice of resurgence is the realization of Indigenous responsibilities in contemporary times. This thesis presents an example of the connection between resurgence and Indigenous food sovereignty.

A major theme that is discussed in resurgence literature is land. As Corntassel (2012) argues, “an alternative to state-centered processes that prioritize the legitimization of settler occupation of Indigenous homeland is community-focused resurgence” (p. 94). Referring to Alfred, he emphasizes that resurgence motivates “a power-surge against the empire with integrity” (Alfred, 2009, p. 24). The empire that Alfred mentions here refers to Indigenous ecocultural territory, currently in the clutches of the colonial capitalist state, where the practice of land-based relationships is a challenge (Alfred, 2009; Cornstassel, 2012). The significance of cultural territory is described through the following aspects - a) land as provider of material resources for survival, b) land that forms identity and c) land that is at the core of all relationships (Corntassel, 2012). According to Coulthard (2012), these are the dimensions that set the foundation of place-based ethics—the principal feature behind the Indigenous mode of relationship. These are components that also constitute responsibilities of place based ethics (Corntassel, 2012).

A place-based ethics signifies an interconnected totality based on responsibilities towards economic, political, spiritual, and social relations (Coulthard, 2014). It is these responsibilities that open up possibilities for a powerful anticapitalistic movement within Indigenous communities, called resurgence (Alfred, 2009; Corntassel, 2012).

The need to acknowledge the ethical responsibility of place is addressed by many (Dirlik, 1998; Escobar, 2001; Massey, 2004; Corntassel, 2012). According to Dirlik (1998), “place consciousness is integral for human existence” (p. 8). Massey (2004) considers place-based responsibility as a political obligation which is necessary to “challenge and change the hegemonic identity of place” (p. 7).

The second important theme that is discussed in resurgence literature is culture. Indeed, a direct connection is made by Charles Tilley (1994) who states that, “personal and

cultural identity is bound up with place” (15). In the context of the Indigenous sovereignty movement in Canada, the conceptualization of culture is crucial since it has an immediate association with the construction of Indigenous peoples’ relationships with land, their identity as “Aboriginal” and their legal political rights that are constructed, erased and sidelined by the colonial capitalist state. As Alfred and Corntassel (2005) argue,

Far from reflecting any true history or honest reconciliation with the past or present agreements and treaties that form an authentic basis for Indigenous–state relations in the Canadian context, ‘aboriginalism’ is a legal, political and cultural discourse designed to serve an agenda of silent surrender to an inherently unjust relation at the root of the colonial state itself. (p. 598)

If we look back to the history of OPCN in Chapter three, four and five, this colonial strategy is clearly visible in the formation of the OPCN reserve. The allocation of reserve land to OPCN, which started as a “rush job” done by the government in order to force through the *Wuskuwatim* plan in 2005 (Waldram, 1988, p. 117) is still incomplete. Only one road and the land where the band office is constructed are considered as reserve land. Under such conditions, the political autonomy of the community’s rights remains disputed and economic reality is conflicted. Clearly, colonial invasion of place is the invasion of land, culture, economy and food.

People living in OPCN as fishers, hunters, trappers, and berry-pickers live in a constant state of emergency. Their ability to live a culturally appropriate life has been undermined by systemic processes of oppression. They have seen their ancestral homelands being ravaged by (hydropower) development—trees drowned under water, seagull nests flooded, islands eroded, declines in fish populations, and the disappearance of some major game species such as caribou.

Clearly, having a community-based food program is not the only alternative economic solution to Indigenous sovereignty. Support should come from multiple sources and should serve a community at multiple levels. Community economy, health, well-being, education, social life and essentially cultural integrity should all be seen as interacting political factors that give rise to change-making projects such as the *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program (IMP). As Alfred (2015) emphasizes:

Culture is inseparable from politics; it's inseparable from our economic way of life. So, to revitalize culture is to revitalize ourselves as sovereign interdependent communities grounded in an ethical relationship to land or place.

Resurgence looks at pathways to counter the cultural disturbance caused by the colonial state and discontinues the reproduction of state hegemony by providing a nuance and power-conscious analysis (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2011; Corntassel, 2012). Land-based activities inspired in Indigenous food sovereignty praxis explain in what ways the resurgence approach can be taken. This is how resurgence associates with the concept of Indigenous strength-based approaches and Indigenous food sovereignty.

A resurgence analysis provides recommendations to celebrate cultural integrity and sovereignty through everyday practices (Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2011; Corntassel, 2012). As Corntassel (2012) puts it, “this is how we move beyond political awareness to on-the-ground actions to defend our homelands” (p. 94). In fact, all resurgence scholars provide clear guidelines on community-level involvement that includes eating land-based food, youth empowerment, practice of language, passing on traditional knowledge; rebuilding leadership and revitalization of land-based activities - both cultural and economic (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005; Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2011; Corntassel, 2012, 2014).

While discussing “collective community efforts”, Corntassel (2012) reinstates

Alfred’s (2009) five objectives of resurgence:

1. The restoration of Indigenous presence(s) on the land and the revitalization of land-based practices;
2. An increased reliance on traditional diet(s) among Indigenous peoples;
3. The transmission of Indigenous culture, spiritual teachings and knowledge of the land between Elders and youth;
4. The strengthening of familial activities and re-emergence of Indigenous cultural and social institutions as governing authorities within First Nations; and
5. Short-term and long-term initiatives and improvements in sustainable land-based economies as the primary economies of reserve-based First Nations communities and as supplemental economies for urban Indigenous communities.

(Alfred, 2009, p. 56).

The *Ithinto Mechisowin* Program (IMP) attempts to initiate the above values and creates a community-based resurgence program. This proves the colonial-racist mindset and discourse wrong, one that otherwise generates a pessimistic view that Indigenous people are incapable of planning or designing community-based programs (Corntassel 2014, p. 69). The success of the program is its approach of working as a collective and in collaboration with supportive organizations. Its involvement with the Fishermen’s Association, community school, health complex, Community Association of South Indian Lake and its approach to sharing helped it to be culturally appropriate and to provide teamwork where the workload is shared.

Additionally, the program’s strength also lies in its strategy of not depending on colonial resources or support. Simpson’s (2008, p.77) view of “confronting a funding mentality” provides an invaluable argument in this regard. She argues that a funding focused mentality is ineffective since “colonizing entities are not going to provide financial support towards” decolonizing projects (2008, p.76-83). Simpson (2008, 2009) attests that Indigenous knowledge is an essential factor for resurgence. She argues that instead of relying on external funding, Indigenous peoples should acknowledge the strength of their available cultural resources—their knowledge base. She says,

In pre-colonial time, we did not rely on “funding” to support the cultural aspects of our lives. Grandparents were willing to teach their grandchildren their culture. Communities, clans, and families supported and took care of their Knowledge Holders. The beauty of our knowledge systems, even in a dominant, capitalistic, commodity-based reality, is that they do not cost capital to maintain. We do not need formalized, funded projects to link youth with our Knowledge Holders; we simply need the will. (Simpson, 2008, p. 77)

OPCN’s attempt to thrive despite having ongoing colonial challenges in everyday life gives an “Indigenous alternative” to capitalism (Coulthard, 2014). An Indigenous food sovereignty practice makes way for this Indigenous alternative. This is a kind of action that can bring “resurgence of Indigenous political thought” and according to Simpson (2013) is rooted in “that intimate and close relationship to the land, which to me means a revitalization of sustainable local Indigenous economies” (quoted in Corntassel 2014, p.170). The IMP is OPCN’s vision of resurgence, attempting to challenge colonial economy, linguistic genocide, food insecurity and most positively it is a culturally grounded platform to connect people.

As of today, IMP is running successfully and continuing its sharing of food and youth training activities. With continuous care from community leaders and organizations, the program has managed to maintain year-round stable relationships with supportive outside organizations (non-government, government and academic) and the community. Since 2015, the program has also started archiving traditional food recipes by publishing a food-recipe calendar each year. In short, the program continues to inspire land-based activities in a number of different ways.

That said, the program has been experiencing challenges as well. These challenges address the ongoing structural discrimination practiced against OPCN that pose serious threats to their well-being. The economic crash after Churchill River Diversion flooding resulted in health and social crises in the community. Although people are interested in

becoming involved in the food program, activities have been stalled, interrupted or even postponed a number of times due to poor health, family issues, alcohol abuse and other existing every day challenges such as lack of running water or adequate health care services.

Manitoba Hydro continues to control the water level of Southern Indian Lake which means the ecological damage continues unabated, including decreases in fish spawning, and the drowning of berries, medicines, seagull eggs, and smaller wild game (beaver, mink, martens, and muskrat). If measures are not taken soon, the community will lose most of its land-based food and cultural practices that tie in with the harvesting and sharing of food.

### *7.1.1 Indigenous food sovereignty as resurgence*

The practice of Indigenous food sovereignty is an integral part of resurgence as it contributes to the practice of place-making, that is people's relationship with land and nature. Indigenous food sovereignty rejuvenates a noncapitalistic relationship between nature and human. This understanding can help realize the deep contrast between the commercialization of nature and having a sustainable relationship with nature. In order to counter this commercialization, Indigenous practices of reciprocity with nature should be respected.

Indigenous food sovereignty is the practice of intergenerational knowledge sharing. The cultural practice of such knowledge sharing was reflected and respected in Indigenous communities through land-based activities. These are practices that maintain nature and human reciprocity and individual and communal responsibilities. The IPM demonstrates that culturally appropriate community-based initiatives can be successful and bring about meaningful change if planned, approved and led by community members. Hence, I argue that these factors are prerequisite to Indigenous sovereignty movement in Canada.

Understanding the complex ways in which settler food systems function and subordinate Indigenous food realities is essential for making successful policy

recommendations as well as integrating Indigenous knowledge in national programs related to health and well-being. Resurgence in Indigenous food sovereignty in Canada is possible through a just food policy that accommodates both the cultural and health rights of Indigenous peoples. From its inception, Canadian food policy was designed with a capitalist base that created a chain of systematic dysfunctions both for Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens of Canada (Macrae, 2011). As Macrae (2011) describes,

The food system was designed, directly and indirectly, to encourage people to overconsume because this contributed to firm profitability, and aggregate levels of food waste received limited attention. This consumption, and the disease it produced, actually appeared to be economically positive because it drove up health care costs and made some of Canada's economic accounts (e.g. gross national product) look better. (p. 425)

Although the food sovereignty movement in Canada has brought a wave of change with increased awareness about health and local food production, the capital focused food policy has not changed, nor has the perspective towards Indigenous peoples' right to food. Remote Indigenous communities are still victims of the high cost of food. Additionally, food inspection and food handling services are not frequently available or adequate in Indigenous communities. Such service requirements and food safety regulations prohibit people from using wild game for both domestic (households) and commercial (schools and local restaurants) purposes.

The national food policy board should have representation from Indigenous communities. Provincial governments should provide support towards culturally appropriate community-based programs that help ensure access to traditional foods in addition to fresh produce. For example, in Manitoba, the provincial government's well known community-based program, the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative (NHFI), mainly offers support to gardening-related activities; supports and reimbursement towards hunting, fishing or trapping

equipment, gas for hunting, fishing or trapping trips are still not considered as eligible categories for in-kind or cash funding (A. Sharma, personal communication April 9, 2014). Although IMP received funding for gardening activities from NHFI, the program committee considers this categorization as one of the many challenges towards program realization

### *7.1.2 Resurgence of resource management*

Governance is an integral part of resource management and needs to be handled based on the participation of various actors using different measures (Bakker, 2015). This thesis confirms that the study of Indigenous food sovereignty is connected with water governance as much as it is with land rights. OPCN's perspective on water management provides a theory of balancing nature and human need for water to maintain a sustainable ecosystem and biodiversity across the entire Churchill and Nelson River system. This understanding is critical to the analysis of contemporary water-energy-food politics. Logically, Indigenous participation in resource development is essential for Canadian prosperity and for a fair and appropriate pathway for the improvement of the situation of Indigenous peoples. Hence, my research experience with OPCN invites future research projects on hydropower politics with a focus on ways to increase meaningful consultation with affected communities including the effective roles of local governments and community members in decision making.

All mitigation plans (e.g., employment opportunities, revenue sharing, support for community business etc.) for hydropower-affected communities should be finalized before a proposed dam construction project proceeds. A mitigation plan should include resources to train community members to be a part of the project steering committee and decision-making process.

Any hydro dam project should seriously consider having fish ladders (a ladder that can help fish to navigate the dam) or trap and truck fish (trap fish and transport them across

the barrier). Even though at its initial stages, fish ladders were considered in the Missi Falls control structure on Southern Indian Lake, the plan was later reversed due to lack of budget (Dysart, personal communication, 2014). Many fishers from OPCN argue that if the fish ladder or trap and truck system had been applied to the Missi Falls construction; it could have drastically increased the number of fish in the surrounding river system connected with Southern Indian Lake (William Dysart, personal communication, August 2, 2014).

As discussed in Chapter Four control and consequences of fluctuations in water levels should be closely monitored by community experts and researchers, not by Manitoba Hydro representatives. Organized support from local/community government is needed for successful recovery of the loss. For example in OPCN, since 2013 Manitoba Hydro abruptly stopped its support towards the community fishery without forewarning the community. A number of fishers reported afterwards that the “role of the band office could be more constructive and democratic” in resolving the ensuing crisis.

That said, the point above brings yet another colonial bureaucracy where Indigenous governance systems were designed by the Indian Act in the form of Band Council, people working in the band office hence are expected to behave like a colonial administration. The leaders in this governing system are trapped with privileges in a poor community to the degree that some of them bow to colonial forces and the myth of the corrupt chief is thus born (apihtawikosisan, 2012). Although the OPCN Band Council did not play a positive role in advocating for or supporting the community fishery, they provided continued support towards the IMP. From 2012 to 2016, the program experienced working with two different groups of people – those elected as band councilors and grassroots organizations and individual community members. Both groups showered the program with positive interest.

This is where UNDRIP can play a role. The UNDRIP is a tool which can facilitate changes in Indigenous communities in Canada by making the federal government include Indigenous rights in the national law (Henderson, 2008). As Mi'kmaq lawyer and activist Palmater (2017) says,

There can be no reconciliation unless the core articles of UNDRIP related to Indigenous self-determination, land ownership, implementation of treaty rights, and respect for Indigenous laws, governments and jurisdictions are part of the legal foundation of what is now Canada (quoted in Morin, 2017).

### *7.1.3 Resurgence in research*

Community-based research on Indigenous food sovereignty should definitely be planned, developed and led by community leaders. Non-Indigenous participants in an Indigenous research paradigm should commit time, learn to listen, and practice the act of unlearning. One should also acknowledge that this unlearning is a continuous process. The process of “research” findings is embedded in power imbalances (Castleden et al., 2015). Academic research and the demanding metrics that validate this research have very little connection with Indigenous cultural practices. For example, oral history or oral presentations of study results will not be taken as seriously in academic settings. Research needs to be published, that too for a specialized audience and using technical language. My experience of writing this thesis was particularly challenging for this reason. I was experiencing challenges trying to express cultural nuances that can be expressed well in Cree, a language which, while I do not know how to speak, I have experienced enough to understand its cultural significance for the research context. Additionally, the Canadian academic system will not allow me to write this thesis in Bengali, my mother tongue. I have tried to incorporate few words from both Cree and Bengali and expressed the entire story in English—I do not think I have succeeded. Therefore, academic research should find ways to incorporate cultural factors and

add allow for a diverse knowledge base as an enriched expression of the work—in all stages of a research project—planning, data collection, writing, presenting, and dissemination.

What is not told explicitly about academic research is how institutional power structures and careerism contribute to the colonial enterprise in the name of community-based research. It is this power structure that defines the nature and depth of community university/academic relationships whereas questions like these need to be carefully marked. Shall we undermine community decision due to lack of time? Shall we decide on an outcome because community members are not responding promptly? Shall we change the course of the research because there was not enough success? Or shall we talk to the person who can speak the university language but has little connection or knowledge of the research subject? A number of times while conducting this university-community collaborative research I had to navigate some tricky situations where deciding my positionality as a researcher was a challenging task. During these times of challenge, I was guided by community members. Interim evaluations of community university-partnerships might help address these challenges, especially in the case of long-term research, so that if there is a relationship fall out there is time to reconsider the research project without hurting the community. Indigenous communities involved in research should have their own research protocols and interested community members and Elders should be a part of the research group as supervisors to guide university students and faculty members.

## ***7.2 Resurgence: A living breathing process of social justice***

The IMP sows the seed of resurgence. It provides strategies for a complex weave of food and culture by creating a “substantive relationship between identity and freedom,” by attempting to “reconstruct and deploy previously disparaged traditions and practices in a

manner that consciously seeks to prefigure a lasting alternative to the colonial present” (Simpson, 2008, p.199).

Food sovereignty scholars emphasize resurgence by focusing on diversity and the “right to act” approaches when combatting all hegemonic practice, even more so in the past few years by looking beyond “binaries” and acknowledging the movement as a “living breathing process” thriving with local actions (Shattuck, Schoavoni and Vangelder, 2015, p. 429). Within the context, Indigenous sovereignty and the Indigenous food sovereignty movement and the larger food sovereignty movement all speak a similar language. Community initiatives like IMP can create deep potential and are making direct contributions to the Indigenous food sovereignty movement with its emphasis on sustainability.

In northern Manitoba, despite major structural challenges, community members are doing their level best to practice traditional food and medicine, in main part because these harvesters are grounded in a culture and mode of production that is egalitarian at its core. The main critique that some of these food champions share is that the interest and scope to get support for agriculture is always greater than any support for hunting, fishing, trapping, berry and medicine picking. Within this context, the concern for academics and activists alike should be cultural integrity, which is still the missing link and is still challenged due to non-supportive food policy and the violation of Indigenous land and water rights.

Hence when it comes to food-related economic realities, emphasis should be placed on culturally appropriate local economic systems, for example the fisheries in northern Manitoba. The booming fishing economy that expanded and was sustained decades after the Second World War was brutally damaged due to the emergence of the commercialization of water and the construction of massive hydroelectric dams in river systems across northern Manitoba. This OPCN case study is the prime example of such collapse. Additionally, the

near-collapse of fishing businesses in the north is being further compromised by product-controlling monopolies like the Fresh Water Fish Corporation. What needs to be realized here is that the “fishermen are the farmers of north” (Dysart, personal com, November, 4, 2013) and that the neoliberal market system is damaging northern fishing economies as much as it is injuring southern farmers markets. Hence fisher rights should receive adequate attention in the action and discourse of the Indigenous sovereignty and food sovereignty movements.

From a broader perspective, the Indigenous food sovereignty movement can re-emphasize the goal of food sovereignty, a call that is creating a coalition among diverse groups from a common space of resistance for a “just and sustainable future” (Nyleneri Newsletter, 13 March, 2013). This platform helps to visualize the role of sovereignty and signifies how “food” is used to hegemonize socioeconomic, political and ecological settings. The politics of power lie within the relationships among state, people, researchers, Elders, youth, food, land, water, practices, memories and stories—this list is diverse and complex. People’s rights to act are defined and practiced by these relationships. This approach to food sovereignty can also help us see how food generates scopes for peoplehood, culture, bond and sharing. The hope lies within the subject itself—food. We can use food to rekindle strength and to create a counter-hegemonic path.

The role of non-Indigenous researchers here should be to push the boundaries to reflect on challenges, resistance and just approaches to right to land and food and very importantly, to be critical of the researcher-self. But what can really be eye opening, educational and healing for everyone is the spreading of stories of strength—building theories using the many other successful community-based food initiatives all around the world, ones similar in intent to IMP. This is how the acknowledgement of the real actors of change should happen, decolonization of research practiced and resurgence initiated.

To understand the depth of Indigenous food sovereignty and role of food that channels strength to cultural modes of production we need to understand the five interrelated components discussed in the thesis—respect, reciprocity, responsibility, relationship and resurgence. As a non-Indigenous woman, my experience of exploring the Indigenous world of food has been vital to my understanding of the sociocultural realm of OPCN. I have seen food as a medium of communication representing an “entire world (social environment)” (Barthes, 1997, p. 23). I realize that OPCN’s continuous bond with land is a way of desettling the settler food system and the colonial mode of production. Resurgence exists in the community through such modes of production embedded in cultural stories, traditional food recipes, ceremonies to share food and all the other relationships and actions that bring people closer to the land.

I have tried to weave conversations, stories, and experience of cooking, harvesting and many other forms of interactive relationships within OPCN into my writing. However, documenting this knowledge, history and culture of people outside of one’s own culture is a loaded responsibility. I acknowledge that what I have tried to present in this thesis is not the complete story and is an outsider’s view. I finish my writing with this discomfort.

*Ekose.*

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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 *Consent Form for Interviews*

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS – videotaping will be for transcription and not for public viewing (on University of Manitoba letterhead)

Research Project Title: A recipe for decolonization: Participating in sustainable development and community food sovereignty with South Indian Lake First Nation

Researcher(s): Asfia Gulrukh Kamal, University of Manitoba

This University of Manitoba study will explore effectiveness of community based country food program at building more self-sufficient, food secure communities and improving healthy living and chronic disease prevention.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take a part in a 1 hour interview. The place of the interview will be arranged according to your preferences, either at your premises or according to your suggestions. The interview will consist of open-ended questions and the main topic being asked will include information on food access in the community. The video or audio-tape recorder will be used to record participation. In order to validate analysis of data and avoid the misinterpretation of the interview conversation you will receive a copy of your own transcript summary report and will be asked to verify the interpretation of your thoughts. There are no known risks other than those in everyday life related to your participation in this study. We do not anticipate that the questions asked will cause any embarrassment or psychological discomfort. You may benefit from participating in the interview by reflecting on your personal experiences with food security initiatives in your community. Your responses will help ensure that community food security funding will result in maximum benefits to community members. Records identifying your participation will be kept confidential. To ensure confidentiality all participants will be identified with a unique code on

forms rather than their names. Access to information collected and to the identity of the subjects will be available to the researcher, her advisors, and committee members. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. All of the information will be retained for the period of three years after finishing this study and kept in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Manitoba premises. After the period of three years the data will be destroyed. Participants interested in the results of this study can receive a copy of the final report through post or email.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and / or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask clarification or new information throughout your participation. This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact Asfia Gulrukh Kamal at [umkamal@cc.umanitoba.ca](mailto:umkamal@cc.umanitoba.ca), Dr. Shirley Thompson phone: at 204-474-9711 (please call collect) or [s\\_thompson@umanitoba.ca](mailto:s_thompson@umanitoba.ca). or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail [margaret\\_bowman@umanitoba.ca](mailto:margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

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Participant's Signature

Date

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Researcher's Signature

Date

## 8.2 List of Major Funding Resources

Funding Source	Year
University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship	2010-2013
Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance (MAFRA)	2012
University of Manitoba Northern Scientific Training Program	2012-2014
SSHRC Insight Grant Award and the SSHRC partnership grant, Sharing the Feast of <i>Ithinto Mechisowin</i> (Food from the Land) and Grow North: Food-based Community Development at <i>O-Pipon-Na-Piwin</i> Cree Nation and Northern Manitoba communities	2013-2014
SSHRC through a Manitoba Research Alliance grant: Partnering for Change—Community Based Solutions for Aboriginal and Inner-city Poverty	2015-2016
Mitas Accelerate Internship from University of Manitoba in collaboration with Northern Manitoba Food Culture and Community Collaborative	2015-2017
SSHRC through <i>Wa Ni Ska Tan</i> Hydro Alliance	2016-2017